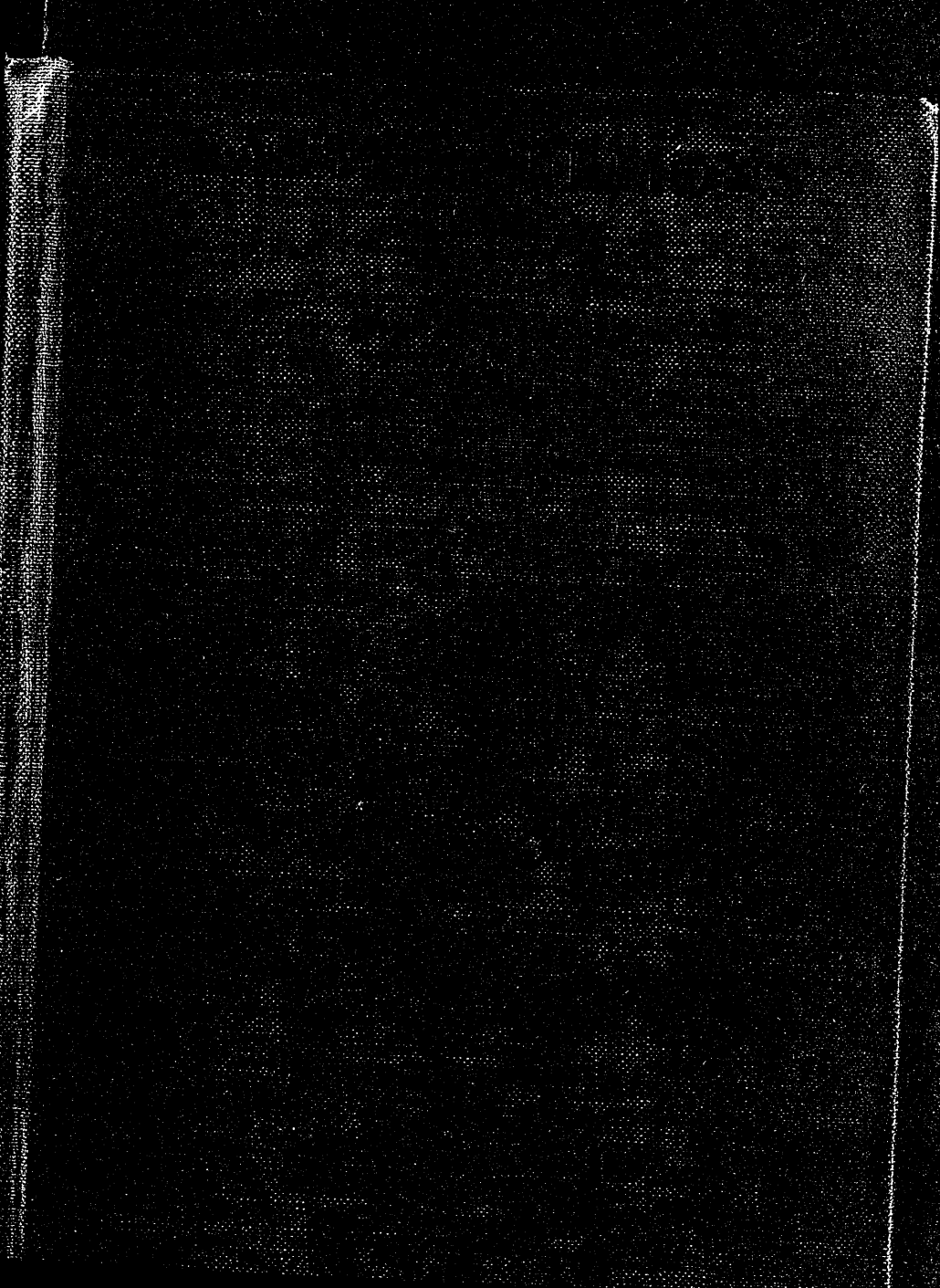




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## EASTER SERMONS



# EASTER SERMONS

BY  
REPRESENTATIVE PREACHERS

EDITED BY

FREDERICK J. NORTH

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Addresses," "Harvest Thanksgiving Sermons,"  
"Life's Beginnings," etc.*



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## PREFACE

The Christian religion offers no more inspiring theme for its teachers than the Resurrection of our Lord; and the following pages contain the best thoughts of representative preachers of many denominations on this great subject. The publishers issue the book in the hope that, like its companion volumes on the other great Christian Festivals, it may prove helpful to all who desire to know the mind of the leaders of the Churches on the central facts of the Christian faith.



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**THE POWER OF HIS  
RESURRECTION**

**BY M. E. AUBREY, M.A.  
Secretary of the Baptist Union**

*"Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"*

I Corinthians ix, 1.



## The Power of His Resurrection

THIS was the seal upon St. Paul's charter. To that experience, of which he was as sure as he was of himself, the Apostle appealed again and again. Did others doubt the validity of his ministry, his right to preach with authority the Gospel that went out from his lips? His answer was this—he had seen Jesus.

Not many years before he wrote this letter men in high places in Jerusalem believed they had broken in good time a movement that seemed to have in it some danger. A young teacher had appeared in the north and had gathered a handful of men around him. When his words were examined they were found to be a challenge to the Jewish belief that God's will was wholly and sufficiently revealed in the Law and the Prophets. His claim as to his own relation to God was blasphemous, so they hanged him near the city, outside it, that the death of such a man might not desecrate the city of God.

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They held it a good day's work. A few men were proud of the achievement. A few others were bewildered by the tragedy of it. The crowd slept that night unheeding and took in their hands again when morning broke the threads of common life. What did it matter? Another Roman cross on a hill, another grave filled in the valley; one more or less, what did it matter? The thing was done. The story of Jesus had reached its end.

But soon those same men of high degree were disturbed again. The followers of the Nazarene had rallied. They said their Master was alive again and had spoken to them. The people listened to them. What should be done? Well, well, Judas and Theudas had risen—and fallen. A nine days' wonder, it would soon be spent. Let it die a natural death.

But it refused to die, so tolerance gave place to warnings, threatenings, imprisonments, scourgings, deaths.

A man of strangely engaging character was the first to die. His name was Stephen. They dragged him out and flung great stones at him and left him on the soiled earth with the life battered out of him.

Another young man saw him die. Saul had

## The Power of His Resurrection

come many hundreds of miles from his home in Tarsus to Jerusalem. His parents were Jews who had sent their lad to the city of his dreams to become learned in their religion. Other students, with the wonder of it all dimmed by familiarity, might hold their chances lightly. Saul had come far. Never should it be said of him that his parents had made their sacrifice in vain, or that he prized his opportunity too little. He flung himself into his religion with a fierce eagerness. Of all the Jews none was more zealous. He joined the strictest sect and was proud of it. With what fury he hated this story of the Nazarene, that challenging religion, those unlearned followers. They must be destroyed. Then he saw Stephen die. He had never seen death like this. Saul was horribly afraid of death, but this man died with light in his eyes, and a face like an angel's. He went away thinking, unsettled. Then it came to him that this power of the new religion to unsettle a faith like his was but another proof that it was an evil thing. There could be no half-measures with it. The fire must be stamped out at any cost, and he would help to do it.

He took up the persecution of the new sect with all his power. He let the fury of it consume

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him. He breathed threatenings and slaughters as a dragon breathes flame ; he tells us so himself. And one red-letter day, armed with all authority, he sets out for Damascus to grapple the evil there, for it had broken out now in that city of Syria. He tramples on every feeling of pity in his soul, and with a grim resolve he goes on his way.

But suddenly at the height of day something happens. He falls. He sees a light. He hears a voice. He is blinded. He has to be led into Damascus. The blindness passes, but Saul does not use his authority. His prey have nothing to fear from him now.

The whole way of his life is turned. He joins the company of the Nazarene. He becomes their leader. He goes from town to town teaching and inspiring them. They learn to trust him, and at length discover what God had made plain to him long ago, that he was to be God's choice man to carry that hated Gospel to lands that had not heard it. They saw him out on his perilous task. On and on he goes, over seas and mountains and plains, through heat and cold, through triumphs and defeats, on stormswept seas, in sunny market places, in gloomy jails, everywhere preaching the

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Christian faith. He is beaten with rods. He tastes a little of Stephen's death. He, too, is stoned and left for dead, lying there where his blood has stained the earth, then rising and going on, ready to be stoned again. Take away the story of Christ, and nowhere in history can a story of more splendid courage than Paul's be found. Someone has called him "Paul the Colossal." That is apt, for his stature is heroic. His intellect matches his temper for its daring and magnificence. In those years of peril and labour he pours forth a stream of letters, of which some remain with us still, in which the intellect of man still finds new depths to fathom, and a light that has brought glory to the darkest haunts of the world. That is Paul.

And when this Paul is challenged by foe or friend he goes back to that noonday. The secret and the authority are there. He tells the mob in Jerusalem. He tells King Agrippa. I'll warrant he told it in every city and ship where he found himself, that every Church he helped to create knew it by heart, and that at the last he told it again to his judges in Rome. "Have I not seen Jesus?" That was all. It was enough.

Now, no man who aspires to give his life

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some value can pass such a story by. We must know its meaning.

Paul says it meant that Jesus Christ lives, and lives in a life of fuller power to bless men than that He knew in the days of His flesh. It is idle to discuss the happening as a psychological phenomenon, a rising up of the real Saul. He probably knew more about himself than we know, and if there is one thing he makes plain it is that Saul never explains Paul. Saul was a Jew who believed that any who died on a cross was accursed, under the ban of God. He may have believed in immortality, but not in a risen life like that of Christ. Every fibre of Saul was Jewish, Pharisaic. He says that when Christ laid hold of him it was as if He had been waiting for him in ambush, and in that moment had leaped out on him and seized him and compelled him to lower Saul's colours and yield up Saul's sword. He was "apprehended" of Christ Jesus.

The hallucination of a visionary and possibly an epileptic—a modern scepticism this, which leaves us with a bigger problem of unbelief than the problem of belief. For where shall we find a story of another epileptic to match it, of a vision and a delusion in an abnormal state being the

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very basis of the whole life of a man in his days of strength when a mighty reason had full play to question and to doubt?

Paul's own explanation is the simplest—that he saw Jesus.

And if we add the testimony of the heroes of faith his explanation becomes the only credible one. The early Church with its strange power built itself on this faith. The Fathers of the Church attest their experience and belief, and they were not ineffective visionaries. Luther knows that old Martin Luther is dead, but "Jesus Christ lives here." And how has it been borne in upon innumerable quiet, hard-working, hard-headed men and women as they reviewed their experience that Jesus Christ was there, a living, life-giving Lord. Livingstone found Him in Africa, a most perfect Gentleman, as good as His promise to be with His men always. Upon that experience and faith the Christian Church stands to triumph.

It is significant that Paul makes so much of it. Life would have been easier for him if he had let it go. The message of the Resurrection was a great difficulty, a stumbling block, but he dared not be silent upon it.

To Paul it was the vindication of God, of Jesus,

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of the goodness of the Universe. If the story of Jesus had ended at Calvary, after such a life, what could be made of a God who left it at that? Who would want such a God?

If there was no word after the Cross, then Jesus was simply wrong. He had struck His blow in a hopeless cause. The universe was against Him. But if Jesus lived! Why, then the Universe was on love's side, and its God was a God of love, and Jesus was right. And all of this and more was wrapped up in Paul's certainty, "I have seen Jesus."

It meant that he had a Friend. Those men are few who at some point in life do not long for a friend, one who will stand by when the way is rough and dark. Paul had found one. That night when the gale drove his ship on Malta he found "the Lord stood by me." Many a man in storm and wreck has sought one who stood by, and found Him. No Gospel of Paul, no effective Christianity, ever could be without that Living Christ.

Aye, through life, death, through sorrow and through  
sinning,

He shall suffice me for He hath sufficed.

Paul based himself upon the faith born in that experience. Thus he came to be the Paul



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we know. At his side in need and in loneliness was Christ. Behind him as he preached was Christ.

When Allenby presented the demand of the British Government to the Egyptian Government he went as a man of peace, without uniform. But he took a squadron of cavalry, who gave him the Royal Salute as he entered the Government buildings and again when he left. The Egyptians knew what he meant. He came as a man of peace but with authority. They knew, the world knew, above all Lord Allenby knew, that behind him was the whole might of the British Empire. The Egyptian Government gave in.

When Paul preached he knew that behind him was the whole power of the whole Universe. He did not speak for Paul, but for Christ, in whom was summed up the love and power of God in the death of Calvary and the Resurrection of Easter morning. So he prevailed.

It is useless to repeat, "I believe in . . . Jesus Christ . . . our Lord. . . . He rose again from the dead," if men do not build their lives upon it. But what that belief, held and trusted, has made of men history will show to any man who seeks. It made Paul. "Unto me who am less than the least of the saints was this grace given that I"

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(such a man as I, do not fail to mark that) “ should preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,” and it grew out of this, “ I have seen Jesus.”

Mr. Stanley Weyman in “ Queen’s Folly ” introduces us to a sea-captain of Nelson’s time, and makes him speak of his hero :

“ Yes, I’ve seen him,” the Captain admitted, reluctantly as it seemed. “ Nothing to see ! A little chap, light in the waist and thin as a curl-paper. Nothing to look at and mild as milk, God bless you. One arm, one eye, about half a man, and sick as a three-months-old puppy when there’s a breeze. Weighs about half a ship’s boy. But in action, when the bulk-heads are down and the linstocks are lighted, then, ma’am——”

He paused so long that Rachel said, “ Yes ? ”

“ A flame of fire.”

“ About half a man,” but that half ablaze ! It might be Paul himself, and if you ask him how it came to be, his answer is ready, “ Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord ? ”

# MAN'S NATURE AND DESTINY

By The Right Rev. E. W. BARNES, Sc.D., D.D., F.R.S.  
Bishop of Birmingham

*“ Then shall I know even as also I am known.”*  
I Cor. xiii, 12.

## Man's Nature and Destiny

THE world in which we live is a very puzzling place. We are always asking questions which are hard to answer.

Why does light go through glass and not through stone? Why can we magnetize iron and not wood? How do bees organize their social life in the hive without speech? How do swallows know their direction as they fly for hundreds of miles to their winter haunts? What makes the tadpole turn into a frog or a grub into a butterfly? Why does wireless apparently travel round the earth so that we can hear a concert in America?

There are half a dozen questions—none of them easy to answer and some at present unanswered. But to mankind the greatest puzzle of all is man himself.

What is man? How has he been made? Why has he been created? What is his life? Whence come his thoughts? What happens to him at death? What is the meaning of his

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desire for knowledge, his reverence for goodness? How can we explain the existence of that inward secret guide which we call conscience? For thousands of years men have asked these questions and they still continue to puzzle us.

What is man? It is only within the last century that leaders of science, cleverly weaving together a vast number of facts, have told us that man has been derived from lower forms of animal life. They picture a slow progress upon the earth, lasting a hundred million years, during which mammals evolved from minute organisms. And they tell us that something like a million years ago man sprang from some ape-like stock; They have thus discovered the machinery which God used to bring man into existence. But to the question, "What is man in himself?" they can give no answer. Obviously he is not an ape, just as an ape is not an amœba or any bit of protoplasm. Ask a man of science how we think and he will confess that he does not know. Obviously our thoughts are connected with our brains but that is about as far as we can get. The nature of life in its simplest manifestation is an unsolved mystery; and when we reflect upon man's spiritual faculties, his knowledge of good and evil, the working of conscience—all those

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powers and aspirations which lift us above the rest of creation—our perplexity deepens.

What is man? You see a boy or girl in the street radiant with youth and health. Is your verdict: "There goes a few score pounds of dust which has been seized by some enigmatic life-force and shall be held by that force for seventy or eighty years"? To me such a verdict seems ludicrous. There is more than that in the heir of all the ages, the fine flower of a hundred million years of earth's development. Granted that living things of the most primitive type have shown an amazing capacity for evolution, we cannot deify—make a sort of god of—the unknown life-force. We must ask why man has been created, what is the meaning of his existence. It is impossible to suppose that there is no meaning in the process that has led to man. It is incredible that the civilization which has been created by man's distinctive spiritual qualities is the product of blind natural forces that have no spiritual purpose. You cannot explain the higher by the lower. Newton and Shakespeare and Wordsworth and Wesley—all the great men commemorated in Westminster Abbey—were not the blind result of innate properties of electrons. Behind the machinery

of the Universe lies Purpose. Through the machine God has worked. Man is God's creation. Man's spiritual understanding is God's gift whereby we can know God's nature and do His will. God, in short, has made us in His own image—for service to Him, for communion with Him.

The ideals which arise within us with compelling power, the spiritual visions which are the great constructive forces of civilization, come from God. They reveal the fundamental ultimate purpose of earth's travail.

"Yes," say many, "goodness, beauty and truth are somehow of primary importance in the Universe. If there is a God, they reveal His nature. And it is quite clear that we must increasingly weave these things into human civilization—we must use knowledge to make human life better and more beautiful—if we are to fulfil what seems to be our destiny. There is a spiritual urge within us. It is that which makes us distinctly human. 'On, on to the City of God,' is a cry which will never lose its appeal so long as man remains man." "But," many such people go on to say, "what am I in this scheme of things? A link in a chain, here to-day and gone to-morrow. A handful of dust in whom the light of the spirit flames for an hour, till other animated



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dust seizes it for an equally brief span of time. I perish while humanity marches on."

Is this so? Is such a picture reasonable? I am sure that it is not. Let us suppose that men in far-distant future ages will create on earth the perfected society which Mr. Wells, with superb fancy, presents for our admiration. Will it last? Yes, we may perhaps agree, it will last for a time. But the sun's heat is declining. Twentieth century astronomers tell us with a new confidence, born of recent observation, that stars die. In the end the earth will be unable to support life. And then what of the human race? It too will vanish and

"Like [an] insubstantial pageant faded  
Leave not a rack behind."

If life in this tabernacle of flesh is the only life of man, then, sooner or later, the purpose of man's creation will be frustrated. If the human spirit, created by knowledge of God and service to Him, is not eternal, the universe is unintelligible; all the manifold spiritual excellence of humanity is merely "such stuff as dreams are made of," unless in putting on Christ we put on immortality.

Christ is risen—that is the message of Easter

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Day. The perfect man rose from the dead. He who was supreme among humanity by the perfection of His spiritual might, and the unswerving steadiness of His moral loyalty, is alive for evermore. He who was *the* Son of God, because He never failed in loyalty to God, died to rise again. These facts explain man to himself as do no other facts in human history. They reveal that man was made that he might serve God and win by his service eternal life with God. Man differs from the beasts fundamentally because he can know God. He can search out the secrets of God's universe. He can distinguish between right and wrong. Within him is a witness to the moral law. God, as it were, works within him while apparently He has moulded all other animals from outside. God has made us for Himself, to understand His purpose and to do His will. And, in imposing new duties on the animal whom we call man, God has offered him a new destiny. The reward of righteousness is Eternal Life. The man in whom the spirit of Christ lives shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven where Christ reigns.

As I see the matter, this faith is not only reasonable but it offers the only intelligible explanation that we can get of man's existence.

## Man's Nature and Destiny

Modern science, so far from rendering it incredible, drives us to it.

We must take facts as they are. Man differs from all other animals. He has spiritual understanding. He has learned to value goodness and wisdom. Conscience is active within him. Man has, in short, a soul. And unless the soul be immortal we cannot conceive why it exists.

When we turn to Christ we see man at his highest. We get a picture of what God intends that man should become. Did He make Christ for nothing? Had the Lord's perfection no meaning in the eternal scheme of things? We repudiate the idea. History repudiates it too. The frightened disciples who fled on Good Friday were, within a brief space of time, boldly preaching that Christ was alive. They had seen Him. It is impossible to explain their new-born confidence and enthusiasm unless it be admitted that they were absolutely sure that Jesus was risen from the dead. The Lord lives. The Lord reigns. The Kingdom of God, eternal in the heavens, is no dream but an established fact. All Christ's teaching as to man's duty and destiny acquired added strength when seen in the light of His Resurrection. The disciples felt that the key-stone had been fitted into the arch of their

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faith. Eternal Life was not a hope but a certainty. Christ had repeatedly affirmed that the grave was not the end of human existence. His own Resurrection confirmed the truth of His teaching.

We cannot exaggerate the importance of the Christian doctrine of immortality. Belief in it transforms our whole outlook on life. It enables us to see the reason of the struggle between good and evil in which we are forced to take part. This life is a process of soul-making. Our spiritual conflicts are divinely ordained that we may win a communion with God which shall outlast death. God has not made man for nothing. We are not earth-bound creatures, mere products of time whom time will destroy. We are potentially sons of God, created to enter a spiritual realm which is Eternal with God. As we try to follow Christ in serving God, we are transformed by the Christ-spirit and made fit for the final home which God has intended us to enter. In putting on Christ, we put on immortality.

The more I ponder upon the mystery of human existence, the stronger becomes my faith in the Christian doctrine of immortality. I spend much time in meditating upon the scheme of the universe which modern science puts before us. It is a fascinating subject of study, and modern

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discovery has so widened the bounds of knowledge that its interest has been marvellously increased. And sometimes the thought comes : We know so much and yet so little. Is it possible that in a few years I shall die and never know what lies at the back of it all ? And then the utter absurdity of such an ending rises before me. No. God will not stultify His action. Surely a time will come when, in St. Paul's words, " I shall know even as now I am known by God." God has made the scheme to which we belong. Because He must be reasonable, His scheme must be reasonable also. And we cannot make a reasonable picture of human activity unless we believe that, as men serve God in striving for righteousness and truth, they win Eternal Life.

O Father, Who didst reveal Thyself in Thy Son Jesus our Lord, give us strength so to follow in His steps that with Him and through Him we may attain life everlasting. *Amen.*



BELIEVING THE UNBELIEVABLE

BY JAMES BLACK, D.D.  
Edinburgh

*“ Why is it judged incredible with you that God doth raise the dead ? ”*—Acts xxvi, 8.



## Believing the Unbelievable

*It was judged incredible*—this is the supreme fact to notice at the outset. Keep that clearly in your mind : it is a governing fact. I know people who talk lightly of the “credulous past,” and of an “unscientific age.” They speak as if the men of Paul’s day were ready to swallow anything, however miraculous and unbelievable. “Ah !” they say, “it is a thousand pities that Christianity could not be tested in its main claims by our doubting, clear-headed, scientific methods. The disciples, and especially the common people of the first century, were simple, credulous folk, who, if they were not gulled, were pathetically ready to gull themselves, and who believed that the miraculous was a better proof of God than law and order. Any extraordinary belief might readily be accepted in a credulous age like that, when men had no idea of what scientific proof really meant.”

Meanwhile—(I shall return to this)—I ask you only to notice the evident implication of Paul’s

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cry. It means nothing less than this—that he was fighting against *an atmosphere of smothering unbelief!* As he spoke about Christ's Resurrection, he saw a light of sheer mental disdain in the eyes of his audience. He was forced to implore for a fair hearing for his thesis. Resurrection, indeed! What an impossible and incredible idea! . . . And then we speak glibly of a "credulous age."

### I

In the meantime, I think we ought to glance first at this bold man who argues for the resurrection of Jesus, and see whether he is a type of person who might easily be deluded. So much of the value of evidence depends on the emotional and intellectual quality of the man who offers it.

I find that I can hardly speak in measured terms of this clear-headed and independent thinker. It is not my verdict, but the verdict of history, that Paul was one of the "brainiest" men who ever lived. Some people, indeed, dislike him immensely just because of his hard logic and his keen, merciless reasoning—they charge him with sacrificing emotion for mind, the heart for the head. We know how he was fully trained in the schools and the arts of his

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day. We know, for instance, how proficiently he had used his training and his gifts to uproot Christianity, to "argue down" its propositions, and actually to subvert this prime belief that Jesus, the foe of his ancient faith, had risen from the dead. If indeed, at the end, he accepted this claim, he accepted it wholly against his own interest and against arguments which he had once used with clear-sighted precision. We can be fully assured that there was no emotional bias and no intellectual interest leading him to "swallow" this or any other belief. He was not a man to be easily trapped by emotion or to be deluded by sentiment. And, above all, he was the last man I can think of who would ever confuse a *statement* with an *argument*. Whatever people may like or dislike about Paul, if they are fair-minded, they cannot help being amazed at his intellectual depth and sweep. He is as clear as daylight, and always mentally honest.

Now the question arises—how did a man of this power and calibre come to accept the resurrection of Jesus as a fact, as indeed *the fact* in his life? For that is what it amounts to. The belief in the resurrection of Jesus so swayed him that it dwarfed all other interests in his mind. No doubt you must have been astonished fre-

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quently that Paul speaks so little of the actual life of Jesus on earth, though he must have been as conversant with these details, and as interested in them, as anybody else. Yet in all his letters it is always the Risen Jesus that dominates his thought. The one explanation is—not that he did not know and was not interested in the earthly career of our Lord, but that the majestic and redeeming thing to him was that *Jesus was risen*. It was that fact which he preached and for which he suffered uncomplainingly. Without any question, this was the keystone of his thinking, and we can only understand the heroism with which he endured imprisonments, scourgings, contempt, ostracism and unbelievable sufferings, when we remember that he stood in the world for a Resurrected Jesus, a Reigning Lord, with whom he had living communion.

### II

In that case, how was he led to accept this strange proposition which ultimately became the one big thing in his Christian philosophy?

Here I return, according to promise, to my opening paragraph to prove that he did not accept the doctrine easily or credulously. My contention is, that he, with all the clear intellectual

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gifts he actually possessed, accepted this creed *against the entire fashionable philosophy of his day*. For I think it can be clearly shown that the thinkers of the first century were much less ready to accept a belief in resurrection than was any succeeding age in our history.

Let us look very glancingly at some of the common views of resurrection of that day of Paul.

(1) Let us begin at home, with the Jews themselves. The people of power and place and influence among the Jews were the *Sadducees*. We know beyond any cavil what their views were regarding the possibility of resurrection. Why ! they even sneered at the deeper question of a future life beyond the grave. You remember how they came to Jesus, as if it were a huge joke, with that conundrum about the woman who had married seven brothers. And their query was (you can imagine the snigger with which they said it) : “ In the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven ? ” No wonder that St. Matthew describes them as “ The Sadducees who say there is no resurrection.” Well, that was the philosophical bias of the Priestly Sadducees—would you call them in any sense “ credulous ” ? . . . We have another significant hint of popular views in the attitude of *Thomas*,

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When the disciples told him of the Risen Lord, he cried passionately, in a spasm of sheer unbelief, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, I will not believe." Truly, a credulous and unscientific age !

(2) If we pass to the popular thinking of the *Romans*, whose influence was as wide and compelling as their Empire, we shall find an even greater leaven of cold scepticism. With their discredited gods and the consequent spirit of irreligion, what else could one expect ? I could weary you with quotations from the writings of the day ; but you will get a flashing light on ordinary educated opinion in the incident of the story of Paul on his trial. When the apostle, as the climax of his argument, asserted that Jesus " should be the first that should rise from the dead," Festus the Roman laughed him down with the sneer that much learning had made him mad ! This was the last straw with Festus—anything was believable except that. . . . And yet there are those who would condemn Festus and his age as " credulous " !

(3) We reach the climax of the prevalent and percolating philosophy of the day when we examine the *Greek ideas* of this subject. That incident of Paul on Mars Hill is wonderfully

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typical. As he addressed the people, passing from point to point, they followed him closely and sympathetically, until he came to what was the crux to him, the resurrection. And then we read, "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked ; and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter." In our colloquial language, it was "too tall a story" ; and when they said, "We will hear you again of this matter," it meant in our slangy tongue, "My dear man, please tell that to the Marines !" I am amazed at the "gasping credulity" of the age ! How ready they were to swallow any tall tale !

### III

Now, that was the "atmosphere" in which Paul accepted this strange proposition of a resurrection from the dead. He accepted the doctrine *against the prevalent philosophy of his age !* In plain words, the popular thought of the time was wholly opposed to any idea of a Risen Jesus. Philosophy was as realistic and as materialistic then as it has ever been : and men had sufficient science in their thinking to know that resurrection was against the observed facts of experience.

What led this clear-minded, trained thinker

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to accept the Resurrection of Jesus, even though the world laughed at him and his beliefs?

I think we may state three things with confidence :—

(1) *He tested and believed the evidence.* He found the fact of Christ's victory as well authenticated as any fact in history has ever been. If evidence counts for anything at all, an unbiased man cannot brush the testimony of the disciples aside. And it is worth noting that the records are fair enough to state that there was nothing but intense gloom and despondency at the death of Jesus, which was supposed to be the end of everything. The two disciples, on the walk to Emmaus, remarked mournfully that *they had hoped* that it was He who should redeem Israel. But alas, all that was now finished—the bottom had fallen out of things ! . . . Yet in spite of this assurance that the end had come, there arose those who proclaimed this unbelievable thing. Paul knew these men and women, and tested their evidence. Jesus was alive for evermore ! He accepted the resurrection because his mind was satisfied with unimpeachable testimony. It was unbelievable : but it was true.

(2) *He knew the quality and utter sincerity of the witnesses.* These were men who were willing



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to risk their lives for their evidence. Their character stood solid at the back of their words. He himself saw a young man Stephen die happily for his faith. He saw others sacrifice the most precious things for their message. And right and left, through persecutions and slander and stonings, these people were unshaken in their testimony. He had insight enough to know that nobody but a raving fanatic is ready to die for an untruth or a fake. They were not deceivers and they were not deceived. He knew that these men were as sincere as they were good.

(3) He himself, by an experience which was as *real* as anything material, *had proof in his own soul that Jesus lived*. That incident on the way to Damascus, explain it as we like, remained the one sure thing in the keen intellectual life of this man who had not the slightest suggestion of anything neurotic in his temperament. God had spoken to his soul : and so, against the creed of the world, he believed the unbelievable.

### IV

I have mentioned these three things which moved him : but even when I have done so, I have not touched the centre. That centre for Paul lay in one little word—*God*. We shall see

what this means if we turn to the question he addressed to Agrippa and Festus, and if we notice what the question *is* and *is not*. It is not—"Why is it judged incredible with you that the dead are raised?" ; but it is—"Why is it judged incredible with you that *God* doth raise the dead?" Everything in Paul's acceptance depended on that little word *God* ! He was not supporting or defending a vague general theorem that the dead are raised ; but he was deliberately resting everything on the known *power* and *love* of God, the Father.

After all, there is no argument for resurrection or for a future life apart from God ! Without an active belief in Him and His interest, any belief in resurrection, here or hereafter, is only a pious wish, beautiful no doubt, but without any basis or value. But to the soul which is sure of God, believing in His power and eternal love as shown in Jesus, resurrection is not only believable but is a natural deduction of our faith in His power and interest. If indeed there be a God, such a God of love and care and passion as Christ proclaimed, then it is natural for the believer to be sure that His care for the souls He loves does not end with this short spasm of life. If the measure of God's love be indeed the

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*Cross of Jesus*—if that represents what He cared for the souls of men—then every Christian may be sure with Paul that resurrection lies deep in the very character of God. For myself, I want no other assurance than that. All the materialistic “proofs” that our weak human nature longs for—spiritualistic seances, rappings, whisperings and levitations—are tragically worthless compared with the assurance of a full faith in the character and heart of God. If God is, and if He be the kind of God of whom Jesus has spoken, everything rests wholly and beautifully in His *character* and *power*. Why should it seem incredible that God, the Lord and Lover of Men, should raise the dead? If He be indeed the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, *it would be incredible if He did not!*

This is the Christian assurance to which the Apostle calls us. I would that we placed this doctrine as centrally in our life as he did. He lived, suffered and died in the power of it. I ask you to imagine, this Easter time, what it would mean for us if we had the apostles' full quiet faith. It would redeem us from everything that is vain and worthless and tawdry; it would give our lives, even their smallest concerns, an eternal meaning; it would bestow on us an

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astonishing power for magnificent living ; it would save us from any ignoble fear of death ; and, most of all, it would link us now with God for ever.

This was Paul's joy—let us share it—*Jesus is risen.*

# WHY DO WE BELIEVE IN PROGRESS ?

BY W. H. CARNEGIE, M.A.

Canon and Sub-Dean of Westminster Abbey and  
Chaplain of the House of Commons

*“ If Christ hath not been raised then is our preaching  
vain, your faith also is vain.”—I Corinthians  
xv, 14.*

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### ST. PAUL'S ESTIMATE OF EASTER

THESE words have in modern times acquired a controversial flavour, but St. Paul did not use them controversially. Those whom he addressed did not regard his statement as debatable. If any fact in the early history of the Christian movement is certain it is the fact that belief in the actual occurrence of Christ's resurrection was the main inspiring and sustaining motive of Christian conduct. "Christ is risen" was the customary salutation with which Christians greeted each other. This was the master belief which dominated their consciousness, and formed the ultimate ground of their common faith and hope. It is hardly too much to say that apart from this belief the Christian movement could never have maintained itself against the opposition which it aroused, nor succeeded in establishing itself as a permanent and powerful factor in the world's civilized progress.

## REJECTED BY MANY MODERN THINKERS

Can we say that the same condition still holds good? There are many modern thinkers and writers who deny this. They may agree that the Christian movement in its earlier stages could not have made headway against countervailing forces had it not been for the motive power supplied from this source. But it is no longer possible, or at any rate it is extremely difficult, to believe that Christ actually burst the bonds of the grave on the third day, that His dead body was actually revitalized then, and transformed into a completely adaptable instrument of His spirit, that thus embodied He sojourned for a time on earth and went in and out among His disciples, communing with them, eating and drinking with them, and inviting them to assure themselves of His reality by actual contact. A wonder story of this kind was credible enough to the child minds of Christ's contemporaries. But it is not easily credible when placed in the context of twentieth-century scientific thought, and tested by its critical standards. Not is its acceptance any longer a necessary condition of moral and spiritual progress. Man's moral and spiritual nature has



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now reached a stage of development at which it can afford to dispense with aids which at an earlier stage were useful, if not indispensable. So there is nothing for it but to relegate this beautiful myth to the realm of poetry. We can there study it with tender admiration and affection, and draw from its symbolism lessons of high import and inspiration. But its retention among the accredited records of historical happenings is no longer practicable, nor indeed possible.

I wonder whether the case really stands thus. I wonder whether St. Paul's declaration is really antiquated and out of date, the expression of a point of view and estimate of evidence no longer tenable. These are questions which I know are exercising the minds of a good many thinking Christians at the present day. Within the limits of a short sermon it would be impossible to deal with them as a whole. But I should like to make one remark bearing upon them, in the hope that it may prove helpful to some who find themselves perturbed and perplexed by statements of this kind.

What I want to say then is this. We must remember that the historical evidence for Christ's resurrection, or its scientific credibility, cannot be considered apart from the question of its

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practical importance. If it is true that belief in the resurrection provides a powerful incentive to moral and spiritual progress, still more if it is true that it constitutes a necessary condition of the maintenance of such progress, this fact cannot but influence our estimate of the evidence for or against its actual occurrence. Before we examine this evidence, then, we must take this preliminary consideration into account. We must ask whether the case stands as St. Paul states it, or as our modernist friends state it.

### THEIR BELIEF IN PROGRESS

Put the matter in this way. What would our outlook on life be if, convinced by the modernists' arguments, we abandoned the traditional attitude and adopted theirs? It would be overstating the case to say that it would at once become a hopeless outlook, that we could no longer believe in the possibility of progress, that we could no longer hope for it nor work for it. St. Paul declared that he himself and his fellow Christians would be affected thus, that if Christ be not risen his preaching is vain and their faith vain, that if Christ be not risen they are of all men most miserable, that if Christ be not risen the only sensible thing to do is to enjoy

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the passing pleasures of life as much as they could and forget about the future—to eat, drink, and be merry since to-morrow they must die. But we cannot fairly describe the attitude of those who deny Christ's bodily resurrection in such terms as these. They indeed claim to be in the very van of progress. They profess to believe strongly in it, and the same profession is made by the majority of men whom we meet from day to day, many of whom are not Christians or only nominal Christians.

### ITS PRECARIOUS BASIS

The belief is for the most part instinctive and traditional. Those who hold it do not, as a rule, attempt to analyse it or to defend it by reasoned argument. They assume that it is well founded, without troubling much about the grounds of their assumption. If we ask them to explain these grounds, their first impulse will be to point to the great advance made in recent years in our power of making the forces of the natural world minister to our physical needs. "Look at our telephones and telegraphs," they will say, "at our elaborate railway systems, at our great steamship lines, look at our manufactories increasing daily in activity and variety, look at our

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intertwined trade routes extending in an elaborate meshwork over the whole face of the habitable globe, look at the food we eat, and the clothes we wear, and the houses we live in, and then contrast all these comforts and conveniences with those which were at the disposal of our forefathers. The contrast in itself is conclusive. No one who contemplates it can question the reality of progress, can doubt that the human race is advancing and that its advance is exceptionally rapid at the present time."

Considerations of this kind do not, however, carry complete conviction. We may admit that the modern man, if fortunately placed, eats better, and drinks better, than his forefathers did. That he wears better clothes, and lives in a better house, and travels faster, and communicates with other men more rapidly and profusely. But these advantages belong to the external apparatus of life, they enhance man's opportunities for expression and enjoyment, but they provide no guarantee as to the manner in which he uses these opportunities : whether he does so to the advantage or to the detriment of himself and his fellow men. The crucial question, the question by which we must test the reality of progress, is whether his own improvement has kept pace

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with that of his surroundings ; whether the modern man is as superior to his predecessors as his outer comforts and conveniences are to theirs.

It is not easy to answer this question with an assured affirmative. If we compare our outstanding men with those of ancient times we cannot say that they are superior to them physically or intellectually or artistically or spiritually. We cannot say that our modern athletes are stronger and better made than the men who competed in the Olympic games or who fought in the Roman amphitheatres : we cannot say that we are producing greater poets than Homer, or greater philosophers than Plato, or greater artists than Phidias, or greater spiritual teachers than the Hebrew prophets. If we make the comparison at a lower level the conclusion is equally disconcerting. We cannot say, for instance, that the average well-educated English gentleman is more intelligent and interesting than the average Athenian gentleman of the time of Pericles, or an abler administrator or law-giver than the average Roman gentleman of the time of Augustus. If we descend to a lower level still, and compare our modern proletariat with that of ancient times the fact that we have abolished

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slavery may at first sight incline us to maintain that here a real advance is apparent. This may be true, but those who have an inside knowledge of the lives of our working classes will not be inclined to stress its truth. They will acknowledge that it is at any rate an arguable proposition that many a Greek or Roman slave had a much better chance of developing his manhood than our slum dwellers have, or than even many of our poorly paid and irregularly employed manual workers have. Certainly they could hardly have a worse chance.

In one respect, and that the most important of all, we were accustomed to regard the argument for progress as unanswerable. "At any rate," it was said, "we can discern sure signs of moral progress. There is no doubt that the general moral standard has risen and is still rising. There is no doubt that civilized men as a whole are more humane, and sympathetic, and self-controlled, and just, and fair dealing than their forefathers were, and that their improvement in these respects has been continuous, and is being steadily maintained." But then came the Great War, and to our amazed horror we witnessed the spectacle of a whole nation of highly civilized men apparently casting aside considera-

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tions of morality and humanity, and committing or conniving in acts of atrocity and cruelty and high-handed injustice which would have disgraced the annals of a tribe of barbarian warriors. The Great War and the events which have followed it have rudely shaken our confidence and complacency. We no longer take it as a matter of course that civilized man has gained the upper hand in his struggle for supremacy over the forces of his brute nature. We have become vividly conscious that beneath the surface of civilized life these forces still exist in unmeasured strength. We are by no means free from forebodings of a recurrence of their activity still more violent and disastrous than that which we have recently witnessed.

### ITS EASTER ORIGIN AND DEPENDENCE

It is impossible to justify the belief in progress by historical evidence. This evidence can almost equally easily be interpreted in the opposite sense. But the great majority of active-minded men of Western Europe hold this belief, and think and act under its inspiration. How are we to explain this fact? It is, you will notice, a distinctive characteristic of the civilized order to which we belong. The civilized races of the ancient world

did not share in it. Their golden age was in the past. Their prevailing disposition was to model themselves on the example of their predecessors, to maintain their virtues and to retrieve their glories. How comes it that our golden age lies in the future and that our prevailing disposition is to press forward towards the attainment of the treasures we think it has in store for us? Only one explanation is available. Our outlook in this respect is of Christian origin. It is the outlook of a civilization founded under Christian auspices and deeply imbued with Christian influences and principles. Behind the belief in progress lies the fundamental Christian conviction that the power of goodness is invincible, and that its final triumph is assured. It was this conviction which made the Christian movement possible. It was this conviction which enabled the early Christians to face apparently overwhelming odds and to prevail against their fierce opposition.

How did they attain to it? How did they come to be dominated and driven forward by it? Only one answer to these questions is possible for any candid student of the New Testament story. Christ had encountered the powers of evil in their concentrated fury and had been



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overwhelmed by them. It was not merely He who died on Calvary : along with Him died the hopes which He had aroused, and the confidence which He had inspired. If He, the perfect embodiment of goodness, had failed to vindicate its power, how could men of far weaker moral and spiritual fibre hope to succeed in doing so? It was small wonder that His disciples forsook Him and fled. Their desertion was justified. Not even personal loyalty and devotion can justify perseverance in a hopeless project ; and if Christ's failure was final His project was hopeless. But it was not final. Easter Day came and its momentous happenings. " Christ has risen," exclaimed His disciples. " He has triumphed over sin and death." The message passed from mouth to mouth and from heart to heart. It became at once the basis of an unalterable conviction, the fountain-source of a perennial confidence and power and hope.

Our belief in progress is the outcome of forces generated by this message. It is a heritage passed on to us from generation after generation of men who have been born and bred under Christian auspices. Of men whose outlook on life has been dominated by the belief that goodness is more powerful than badness and must

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in the long run prevail. They have indeed for the most part imbibed this belief instinctively and unconsciously, but their thinkers and writers if pressed to explain it and justify it with one accord have done so in terms in no wise differing from those used by Christ's first disciples. Our modernists tell us that these terms are no longer acceptable. Our reply is that none other are available : that if Christ be not risen their preaching of progress is vain and their hearers' faith in it is also vain.

That then is the aspect of the fact which we commemorate at Eastertide to which I wish to draw your special attention. The significance of that fact is far more than personal. It is the ultimate basis of that belief in progress which is the distinguishing characteristic of our modern civilization : the ultimate guarantee that such progress is possible and attainable. Those who in the name of progress would have us exclude this fact from the realm of historical happenings are making an unreasonable and self-contradictory demand. Such exclusion would mean the drying up of the fountain source from which the stream of progressive effort has hitherto flowed and on which its replenishment depends. Modernism of this type has no right to pose as a

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progressive movement. It is in its essence a reactionary movement, making headlong for the listless indifference and stagnation which marked the outlook of the ancient civilizations in their later stages. A new era dawned on the first Easter morning. The light which flowed from the empty grave was the light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world, and inspires him with a new hope and power and confidence. The true leaders of progress are those who can discern that light through the clouds of doubt and sin and walk steadily forward along the path illumined by its rays.



# JOY IN THE RESURRECTION

BY H. C. CARTER, M.A.  
Cambridge

*“Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him.” . . .*

*“And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him.”*

*· Luke xxiv, 15, 16, 31.*

## Joy in the Resurrection

WE ought to be very glad to-day. It is the day when the news rings out for us again that God has conquered death for us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Perhaps we should do well to ask ourselves, in honesty, whether we have that gladness. For so we test our faith. There is a great deal in the world and in ourselves to make us sad and despondent. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crowned by the good news of His resurrection from the dead, comes with a message of joy into which we may enter now and be at peace. Have we found that joy?

*"What manner of communications are these that ye have one with another as ye walk, and are sad?"* Are we like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus? They were truly disciples. They had not given up their belief in Jesus. They had seen in Him all that was good and true and beautiful—the One who was worthy to be King of the world. They *"had trusted that it was He*

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*who should redeem Israel,*" who should bring in the golden age. But their hopes had fallen low. Jesus had been worsted and slain, and was two days dead. They still believed in Him. If He was worsted He was not less worthy to be loved and followed. Why should it be so? If good is conquered that does not make it less good. If right is overthrown by might it is not proved wrong. But where was God? What was to become of their faith in *Him*? He let these things be. The heavens were silent. It was just because they had so much of love for Jesus and had rested so much of hope in Him that they were sad. If they had not thought Him great and good beyond all the sons of men, His defeat would not have cast them down so low.

Some of us are like that. We are disciples of Jesus. We believe Him to be good and great beyond all the sons of men. We have not followed Him very closely or faithfully, but we have known, and know still, that He is the One to follow. His way is the holiest and best. If all would follow Him the world would be happy, and the golden age would dawn. Yet some of us, on this Easter Day, are sad; perhaps all of us, with some part of our too-little believing hearts, are sad. For His coming—for the world, and



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for us—seems to have ended in failure. “*And beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done.*” “Beside all this,” we perhaps say, “it is nearly two thousand years since these things were done.” How can we be glad?

We have heard people say that in spite of all this seeming defeat of Christ, all is well. We have known a few at least who have had a serene confidence in God which nothing on earth could shake. And, of course, we are not so ignorant of history as not to know that the Church has borne witness through all the years, by its doctrine, and at rarer times by its life, that Jesus has been victorious, and is now no longer a teacher and example numbered with the dead, but a risen and exalted Saviour. Like those two going to Emmaus, we have to admit, *Some of our company came saying they have seen a vision which told them He was alive.* We have not doubted what they said, for they have been people whom we trusted. And as far as they could communicate to us their evidence and we could examine it for ourselves, we have found it true and sound. You remember how those disciples went on, *And certain of them that were with us went to the sepulchre and found it even as they said.* But like them we have had to add, *But Him they saw not.* We have not had

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the glad experience of knowing by direct certainty for ourselves that Christ is risen from the dead. And to-day, as we sing the Easter hymns, we have not the thrill of joy that ought to be ours in this most wonderful message. "*What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another as ye walk, and are sad?*"

Do not let us be afraid to confess it, if things are so with us. It is always good to acknowledge the truth. Let us be humble in God's house. God begins with us where we really are. Let us admit our want of confidence and assurance : not as worldly men and women who are proud to be sceptics about heavenly things, but as those who long to find the truth of God, who have seen in Jesus the one whom it is good to love and follow, who mourn because we lack the joy which ought to possess those who indeed believe that He is risen from the dead.

And now let me try to say a few simple things about the way in which we may come to the joy of an assured faith in His resurrection. I speak to those who feel the need of that assured faith.

Let us remember to begin with that that faith has actually been from the first, and is to-day,

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to very many, the secret of a joy unspeakable. "In whom though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." "They returned from Jerusalem" (those disciples upon whom the truth that He was risen first dawned) "with great joy": "and they were continually in the temple praising and blessing God." The story of the early Church rings full of joy: trial, prisons, persecution, martyrdom—but joy that nothing in the world could touch. And the story has gone on. That joy has not left the world. Those hymns we are singing to-day were written first by men who had the same joy in the knowledge of the risen Saviour as the men of the first days. This joy is to be found—for people like us: weak, tempted, frail, and foolish men and women like us have found it. What is the way to that joy? Or rather what is the way to that conviction of the truth that Christ is risen from which that joy has flowed?

### I

The first condition of our receiving with our hearts the truth of Christ's resurrection is that *we should want to find it true*. We must begin there.

Not that it is ever enough reason for believing

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anything that you would like it to be true. It is not : of course it is not. Some of our most disastrous mistakes and delusions come that way. But in matters of religious faith, which is an action of the whole soul—mind, heart, and will, reaching out after God and apprehending His truth—if we do not want that truth, the way of entrance to it is barred for us.

And if we are living unholy lives, content with them—if we are living for this world and loving it, we shall certainly not desire to be convinced that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. That is too terrible a truth for the self-contented sinner. It brings the mighty power of God, whose judgments against sin are holy, too near to us. If Jesus rose, and is alive to-day exalted at God's right hand, He is alive to judge us : not in anger, truly, but in a holy love which must burn hot against our sin. And if we cling to sin, we must shrink from that judgment. If we, in our lives, are opposing and rejecting Him, like the men who put Him to death, we shall want to set a watch and guard upon His tomb to prove, to ourselves at least, that He is not risen.

You must have noticed, in reading the story of the New Testament, that the evidence of the Resurrection was never given except to those

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whose hearts were so set towards Jesus that they wanted to find it true that He was alive. I think that is so even of Saul of Tarsus, the last of those to whom Jesus appeared in risen glory. Jesus showed Himself to him, it is true, when he was on the road to persecute His followers. But Saul was then kicking against the pricks. He was divided in his mind. With half his heart at least he was being urged against the way of hatred to Christ which he was pursuing. With half his heart—and it was the truer half—he *wanted* to believe. And so he came ready to see the Lord. No proof of the Resurrection was ever given to the unbelieving world. Christ was not raised publicly. He was put to death publicly, in the eyes of all the world. But He was raised privately. Only those who had the heart and will to receive it might know *that* truth. Is it that God would not put too great a weight of responsibility upon men's souls? He does not give men more light than they are able to bear.

If we desire to go on sinning, we cannot have the assurance given us that Jesus Christ is risen. Our selfishness and impurity and cowardly conformity to the world keeps us back from faith. And perhaps to all of us, even those who are

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trying to follow Christ and live by His Spirit, this needs to be said. For we are so divided in will and purpose. We keep hold upon the world with one hand while we try to hold Christ with the other. Would it be nothing but joy to us if we could discover that He is indeed alive—watching us, walking with us, in that unseen glorious state in which He now lives, in every place, at every hour? Do we long for His presence? Could we bear His scrutiny? He does not reveal Himself to us until we want Him.

Yes, this is the first condition for our joyful apprehension of the truth that Christ is risen from the dead—that we should *want* to find it true.

### II

But let us next think *what kind of evidence* it is that is given to produce this great conviction, with the joy it brings. I have read of people being brought to a conviction of the truth of Christ's Resurrection through studying the evidence of the New Testament stories of His appearances to the disciples. But I do not think that the whole story of what happened in their minds has been told. The old divinity books used to make a good deal of this kind of historical argument : Paley's *Evidences*, for instance. But not many

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people are ever helped to believe in that way. It is significant how little of *argument* there is about any of the things of religion in the Bible. Men do not come to faith by argument, and when they have come to it, it is not their chief concern to *argue* others into it. What they know they must do is just to *witness* to it.

All you can get at best from a logical argument is a logical belief, and that is not religious faith. Hume, the philosopher, was quite right when he said that no amount of testimony, of the kind you weigh in a law court, could prove a miracle. His ground was that to the end it would always be more likely that the testimony was false or inaccurate, than that the miracle happened. On this plane of sight and sense that is absolutely true. A miracle cannot be proved to the reason. If it is, it is only like a conjuring trick. A miracle is an evidence of God. And it is the soul, not the intellect, that must apprehend God. We remember the words of Jesus Himself: "*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*"

And this, too, is where all the attempts of Spiritism to bring solid comfort to the human spirit by establishing the truth of communication

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with another world where the dead are living, through material evidence, must inevitably fail. There are other things as well to be said against Spiritism—how it cuts across our truest instincts of what is healthy and sane and right. But apart from that, there can be no material evidence of the spiritual world. God is Spirit. He touches us through the sacraments of sense—not two sacraments only, but the multitudinous sacraments of all beautiful and wonderful things. And miracles in the outer world are sacraments of His grace. They are apprehended in their truth and meaning by faith, an activity of the soul. We cannot have God proved to us, nor any of the works of God. We have to prove Him for ourselves by faith.

And so with the truth of Christ's Resurrection. The story of it is a sacrament of a truth which reaches into the spiritual realm. You might believe that story to be true, as many people do, without ever grasping the spiritual truth. Faith must enter ; faith, which is not believing without evidence, or believing against evidence, as some have falsely caricatured it, but seeing through the material evidence, as through a coloured window, the light and glory of spiritual fact.

And so we need the heart of faith. And that



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is the childlike heart. The little child, so Jesus told us, is our teacher in the way of entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Children do not believe everything : they do not believe things that contradict their reason, they are very quick to question things which go against what they have learned before. But they do not disbelieve things because they are wonderful, or hard to understand ; least of all do they disbelieve things, as we often do, because they are too good to be true.

We are told in one of the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection that some of the disciples "disbelieved for joy." It was too good to be true. We get so used to cultivating the despondent heart. It is the influence of the world upon us, always cynical, always despairing. And when we are faced with the amazing tidings of Christ's Resurrection ; when out of our dogmatic slumbers we wake to hear the message in its living reality and power, to realize what it means—what it means about Jesus, that He who lived in Galilee and Judæa still lives in the power of an endless life—what it means about death, that it is really a conquered foe—what it means about God, that nothing, neither life nor death, can separate us from His love—when we hear these things, we say, No, I dare not believe

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that : it is *too good to be true*. We often fail in religious faith because out of our intercourse with the faithless world we have grown afraid of being disappointed. Never to fear disappointment in God—that is faith. We must have the heart of childlike trust and expectancy.

### III

And then how does this evidence—evidence which is spiritual, but comes through the sacrament of material things belonging to the world in which our present lives are set—*how does it come ?*

It comes in lowly ways, through common things. It comes to the seeking soul along the ordinary paths of daily life and duty. Oh, brethren, I wish I could tell you this as it ought to be told. The truth that Christ is risen from the dead, to be with you as your ever present Friend, to overcome death for you and for those you love, to be in you the hope of glory—the old familiar fact of the earthly story told in the Gospels, and the meaning of heavenly truth written in Christian hearts—spring together and become an object of joyful faith, not through much search and struggle, but through simple quietness, if we hold our souls in earnest readiness

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to see God's light. "He to the lowly soul doth still Himself impart."

We are all at times—are we not?—conscious of holy influences that seem to shed a quiet glow upon our hearts; the vanity of earthly things becomes plain to us, the glory of a heavenly guest, the supreme sanctity of love, the reality of God. Sometimes in moments of solitude they come, as we read or think, or try to pray; sometimes at church, at the communion table, perhaps oftenest there; sometimes in intercourse with friends; sometimes in the busy throng of life. Whence are these influences? What is it that draws us then to be brave and true and pure, to hate our sinning, our worldliness and poverty of soul? It is the presence of Jesus Christ, the presence of the living, human God, who comes near and goes with us. And sometimes our eyes are holden that we do not know Him. Blessed are we if we retain those holy influences, if we refuse to let their light depart when the shades of earthly preoccupation descend upon us, threatening to leave us desolate among the world's crowds; blessed if we say, *Abide with us, for it is towards evening*, and if, not knowing how divine is our guest, we constrain Him to stay.

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For in the commonest things, as on that night of old in the breaking of the bread at an evening meal, our soul will be led to recognize the Lord. Our eyes will be opened. And though the rapture of the moment of first glad recognition be given not to stay—*He vanished out of their sight*—yet the knowledge that He is risen, never to be far from us, though unseen, never to leave us to pass through any way of darkness alone, will remain with us, if we choose to hold it fast. And we shall look back and see that it was indeed His company and none other that gave all the strength and sweetness to all the truest moments of our life in times gone by : *Did not our hearts burn within us as He spake to us in the way ?*

We ought to be glad to-day. For He is risen. How is it that we have not faith ? Have we not been eager enough to find it true ? Have we been cowed by the world into believing that only unhappy things—things that are less than perfectly good and beautiful—can be true ?

How patiently and gently God calls us into His Kingdom of heavenly light and love. He works by no method of compulsion on our souls. He shines upon us with the light of His truth

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in Christ, and waits for the unfolding of our faith like the petals of the flowers in the sun's rays in springtime. The truth of that mighty working of His power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead is brought to us again to-day. May His Spirit move us to give Him the answer of faith, and praise Him with the pure gladness of our hearts for His unspeakable gift.



# THE LIGHT OF EASTER LIFE

By E. A. Down, M.A.  
Hon. Canon of Southwark

*"And God said, Let there be light : and there was light. . . . And the evening and the morning were the first day."*—Gen. i, 3, 5.



## The Light of Easter Life

### I

THE inspired writer is describing the gradual formation of the world as a home for man. Its condition was at first chaotic—bearing, perhaps, the traces of some great primeval catastrophe—one mass of confusion, blackness, ruin ; manifesting no spark of life, nor breath of movement ; a wild, dreary waste of stagnant water ; a vast desolate expanse which presented no feature on which the eye could rest. “The earth was without form, and void”—in which there was nothing that could be distinguished or defined—“and darkness was upon the face of the deep.”

That was the picture ! But He, whose office it is to create and to sustain, the ever-blessed Spirit of God, does not leave the divine handiwork in this condition of hopeless gloom and despair. The divine Breath began to “move”—or to brood like some bird hovering over its young—with all His quickening energy, “over the face of the waters.” This unseen, mysterious, irresistible Presence—the same Spirit that was to

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raise up Jesus from the dead—is already at work, and bent upon imparting new life into that which was as yet formless and void.

Then at last God speaks ; and when God speaks, “ it is done.” He has only to command, and things are forthwith created. One moment suffices to transform that desolate scene into a rich panorama of radiant magnificence. The light rises over the glittering surface to reveal the orderly purpose of God. Things do not emanate from Him by chance, but they come into being through an act of His *Will*. Each stage in the process was the realization of a plan deliberately formed in the divine mind. Chaos disappears by being transformed into a cosmos where the reign of law prevails ; and the grim shades of night are chased before that glorious sheen of sparkling splendour which fills God’s universe with all its wealth of dancing gladness and of glory. “And God said, Let there be light : and there was light. . . . And the evening and the morning were the first day.”

### II

And it must have been a very similar experience which passed over the face of creation, and over the hearts of the friends of Jesus Christ, on that

## The Light of Easter Life

first Easter morning. The disaster of Good Friday had plunged them into a condition of hopeless chaos and despair. The Crucifixion had dealt the deathblow to all those expectations which, even through the darkest hours, had sustained them since the day they had made their great venture by becoming disciples. No doubt it ought to have been otherwise. They had been warned in plain language of what was to be the ultimate issue of Jewish opposition, as well as of the triumph which lay beyond it. Such predictions had been uttered frequently, and with increasing emphasis as the end drew near ; but somehow they managed to ignore their true significance. They persuaded themselves that the Master was taking too gloomy a view of the situation. Those gathering clouds, which seemed so menacing, would soon disappear. The gravity of the outlook was but evanescent and accidental. Human nature, under such circumstances, is apt to be optimistic, and they were convinced that at the last moment our Lord would *declare* Himself, that He would exert His miraculous power for once on His own behalf, and that, when the great crisis arrived, His enemies were destined to be scattered in utter discomfiture.

And so when the final tragedy occurred, they

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proved quite unable to meet it calmly. They felt like men who had staked everything on some enterprise which had collapsed. All their cherished ambitions lay buried in that garden grave, as dead as He was whom they had trusted and loved. A black night of gloom and disappointment, in fact, had settled down upon their life ; and their mental condition was summed up in that pathetic lament of the two sorrowing disciples on the Emmaus road—"We trusted," they say, but our confidence was misplaced, and such trust is no longer possible, "we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel."

But all these dark shadows were dissipated, as on Easter Day "the Sun of Righteousness" arose victoriously from the grave, "with healing in His wings." All this despair must be groundless and irrational, as fresh evidence of the resurrection kept on arriving from every quarter, which put the *fact* beyond dispute. New light was being shed abroad on the hearts of each member of that little group which made life again not only tolerable, but which invested it with larger and more glorious hopes—on penitents, on sorrowful disciples, on St. John who had stood beneath the Cross, and on St. Peter who denied Him.

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It was the dawn of a greater and a brighter day than had ever yet burst over creation—a new era in the evolution of the ages, and in the history of mankind—when “the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a giant refreshed with wine,” when death’s Conqueror, leading captivity captive, “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” ; when man’s destiny became irradiated once and for ever with the conviction of a triumphant certainty ; when the true “dayspring from on high” dispersed the shades which hung so heavily over a sinful world ; and when the fiat of God Almighty sounded forth once more in trumpet tones, as at the Creation, “Let there be light : and there was light. . . . And the evening and the morning were the first day.”

### III

It may be that another such day is in store for *ourselves*, if we are worthy to reach it, when the Christian, too, shall pass through the grave and gate of death to a joyful resurrection. “As He is, so are we in this world.” It is our privilege to reproduce the earthly life of the Master—to live, to work, to suffer, to die, to be buried, with Him—as the condition of sharing the great Easter experience. Here and now we grope

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through a sinful world ; we are constantly faced with dark and perplexing problems ; we have to carry on our conflict with depression and disappointment ; we are no strangers to sorrow, bereavement, grief and pain—but all these things “in Christ” must reach a triumphant issue. There was a veil of profound darkness spread over the face of the deep at Creation, and a mysterious pall overshadowed the land for three hours on Good Friday—“a darkness which may be felt.” But “the darkest hour of night is that before the dawn.” So there is a darkness still which precedes the daybreak of the eternal morning. That is why every true believer is seized with the sense of such joyful exultation at Easter. He feels himself inspired with all the certainty of a great conviction, since the resurrection of Jesus Christ is at once the warrant for a new transfigured life in this world, and the pledge that all earthly sorrow will some day be “turned into joy.”

We hear doubts sometimes expressed as to whether historic Christianity, with all these supernatural claims, is destined to maintain its hold over the minds of thoughtful men in the future. Such gloomy prognostications are not uncommon at the present day. Times of upheaval

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are invariably accompanied by some such sense of unrest, and at such periods we must anticipate the recrudescence of wild schemes which predict a success for their own propaganda which Christianity is thought to have forfeited. That is why such novelties as Christian Science, Theosophy, Spiritualism, and systems of undogmatic comprehensiveness are attracting notice just now, achieving some measure of ephemeral popularity, and gaining adherents among the unsettled and the dissatisfied. History repeats itself—for the years which immediately followed the great French Revolution a century ago were rife (we are told) with similar proposals. The promoter of one such scheme (Larevellair-Lepeaux), it is said, once confided to Talleyrand his own bitter disappointment at the ill success of his attempt to bring into vogue a sort of improved Christianity, a kind of benevolent rationalism which he had invented to meet the wants of a sceptical age. "His propaganda made no way," he complained, "and what was he to do?" Talleyrand was a Bishop who had lost his faith, but whatever we may think of him as an apostate prelate, he was certainly endowed with a brilliant intellect, he was a keen judge of human character, and he was acutely alive to those forces which make

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for success. "The ex-Bishop politely condoled with his friend ; he feared it was indeed a difficult task to found a new religion, more difficult than could be imagined—so difficult, in fact, that he hardly knew what to advise. "Still"—so he went on after a moment's reflection—"still there is one plan which you might at least try : I should recommend you to get yourself crucified, and to rise again on the third day."

Yes—for that, as he knew well enough, is the keystone which binds together the whole fabric of our faith, and which constitutes its claim upon the acceptance and homage of the ransomed race. There are fashions in human thought, but they are well nigh as transitory as fashions in people's dress. Public opinion is proverbially fickle, and subject to chance. Ages of faith are liable to be soon succeeded by ages of doubt, and there are crises when even revealed religion may appear to be in danger of suffering some partial eclipse. That is true—and yet Christianity, like its Divine Founder, seems instinct with some inherent power to rise from the grave where the sceptic fain would bury it, and to vindicate once more its claim upon the allegiance of mankind. For in spite of that "change and decay which all around we see"



## The Light of Easter Life

there are certain disturbing elements in human experience which live on with amazing persistency, and they happen to be precisely those elements with which Christianity professes to grapple. It may be popular nowadays to make light of *sin* ; but there are occasions when conscience reminds us somewhat peremptorily, not only that sin needs a Saviour, but that it cannot be quite so easily dismissed or explained away. Death, likewise, can for a time be kept at bay, or banished from the mind as some unwelcome intruder at the banquet of human happiness ; but death is “no respecter of persons,” and when death draws near to claim its victim, there are certain disquieting questions which are not easy to ignore. So long as men sin, and so long as men die, we may rest assured that the question of the resurrection of Jesus Christ will have to be confronted by the world ; and so long, too, will the evidence for its truth as an historic fact continue to be discussed, because it is vital to the system of whose reality it is at once the guarantee, the corner-stone, the crown. Jesus Christ has put forward a claim—with which men must reckon—to be “the light of the world.” By rending asunder the portals of the empty tomb, He has vindicated His title to be heard. By His

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death He has destroyed death, and by His rising to life again He has illuminated the darkness of this sin-stained world with beams of glory beside which that brightness which once spread over the face of creation pales into the merest insignificance, when "God said, Let there be light : and there was light. . . . And the evening and the morning were the first day."

THE LARGER VIEW OF THE  
RESURRECTION

BY R. C. GILLIE, M.A., D.C.L.  
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*" We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life ; But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God which raiseth the dead : Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver : in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us."*—II Cor. i. 8, 9, 10.

Dr. Weymouth's translation : *" We were exceedingly depressed, quite beyond endurance, so that we renounced all hope even of life. Nay, we have had the presentiment of death within ourselves, in order that our confidence may repose, not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. He rescued us from so imminent a death, and will do so again ; and we have a firm hope in Him that He will still rescue us."*

## The Larger View of the Resurrection

THERE is a narrower view and a larger view of the Resurrection of our Lord. It is the great service of St. Paul that he not only added important evidence for the fact of the Resurrection, but also permanently enlarged the thoughts of Christ's people concerning it. In the narrower view our eyes are focused on the death of the body, our hearts seek answers to questions concerning immortality. If we never pass beyond this our lives are wonderfully enriched by confidence in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It floods physical death with light and hope : it answers our chief questions concerning the unseen life which often seems so silent : it both confirms and transforms the dim hopes and unstable beliefs that have haunted the heart of man since the far-off days of ancient Egypt.

### I

The Resurrection of Jesus *confirms* our hopes. It asserted authoritatively that to enter the unseen is not to cease to exist but to continue to exist. It unsealed the silent grave and dis-

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crowned triumphant death. At one time, to die was to set sail over an uncharted ocean, grey heaving waters without a visible shore or promise of one. After Jesus came back from that strange voyage, it was demonstrated that there was a shore beyond the devouring waters. The surmises and presages and trembling hopes of mankind were confirmed on the first Easter morning.

More than that, the Resurrection of Jesus *transforms* our thoughts of the unseen. When a soul goes forth at death, like a ship vanishing over the dim waters of an unknown sea, we now know, not simply that the soul will arrive at some shore, but also that, if the soul be rightly prepared, the shore will be friendly, without frowning cliffs and jagged rocks, not a hostile strand lined with enemies and tortures but a true haven, a homeland, a place with a welcome. "The Father's House" might be still but a beautiful dream to us, were it not that our Lord came back to assure us that the hidden shore is kind to God's people and His own warm presence makes it home. It is no small thing to see the mists lift and the shadows shorten as we use this testimony of Easter Day to rob death of its chief horrors. Could we go no further in conviction,

# The Larger View of the Resurrection

The Resurrection of our Lord would be one of the chief fountains of hope.

## II

But our convictions can expand far beyond this initial point.

If Jesus had been only a good man, a really trustworthy witness, who came back after death, any kind of death, in this unmistakable way, the testimony concerning personal immortality would have been valid and in some degree precious. It is because He was so much more than an ordinary person and His death so different from an ordinary death that His resurrection means so much more than the resurrection of a man of average goodness after a normal death.

This is particularly true of His death. The fact is that when He was slain much else was slain. The disciples' hopes died. Righteousness seemed to have received its death-blow. There are so many deaths besides the death of the body. There is the death of honour, of hopefulness, and of justice ; the death of a heart, of a soul and of a nation. The usual energy which makes a life really a living thing can be slowly drained away till death supervenes. Belief in a righteous Ruler of the Universe can be bludgeoned or poisoned

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till it dies. No amount of evidence concerning personal survival will necessarily save us from such deaths as these. It is the glory of Christ's resurrection that it does.

Something of this kind St. Paul had experienced just before he wrote this letter to the Corinthians. He lived a threatened life, but it was not a sudden, violent death he dreaded so much. The burdens of life were the chief menace. These were killing his spirit. Life had become so laden and so perilous that he felt it to be unbearable. "I absolutely despaired of life," he writes. "Yes, and when I asked 'What shall be the end?' the whispered answer of my heart was Death" (Way's translation). He had got to the end of things, as we say. "So great a death," he tells his readers, threatened him—an abyss, an overwhelming flood. That did not mean physical death. In a dozen passages we can learn how completely he had been delivered from that kind of dread, however brutal the shape of death. It was one of the other deaths, which lurk about our steps while we live on here, that had nearly broken him.

From this overshadowing horror he had escaped when he gave up the last remnants of self-confidence and stayed himself entirely on



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God, the raiser of the dead. There was virtue in our Lord's resurrection which had dealt with this particular kind of death that had haunted his spirit for days.

Out of his own experience, then, he gives us the larger view of the Resurrection of Jesus. To the apostle, it proclaims not only that man is deathless but also that righteousness is deathless, and hope is deathless, and mercy is deathless. It brought a message concerning sin and this life as well as concerning death and that life. It flooded the present world with new meaning and the present life with new confidence. It solved problems of the present as well as of the future. It reversed the world's verdicts, countered the world's sneers, offered a cure for the world's hopelessness.

### III

There are two truths in particular which, through the larger view of the Resurrection, are amazingly strengthened and brightened. They are both confirmed and transformed. The first is the message concerning sin which we call the Gospel; the second is the conviction concerning the reality of God's rule, His righteous government of the earth.

Think this out and you will see that it is so.

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(1) During Jesus' lifetime, the apostles were sent out more than once to give a message for Him. This was the message : " The Kingdom of God has come nigh you." This was their gospel and they believed it because of their confidence in Him. But when He was put to death they had no gospel left. All His beautiful words about God being the Father, about the new era, the new life and the new calls—they could not believe them any longer because He on whose faith their faith rested was Himself gone, extinguished, obliterated. A few of them might have striven to make the distinction familiar to us between truth and personality, and have reasoned that what Jesus taught was true, though it had not been proved true in His own experience. But how few these would have been, how timid and wavering a gospel theirs. It was entirely different when their Master was restored to them. Unhurt by death, glorified and radiant because of the tomb, He was the strongest testimony to His own Gospel. Their old confidence revived and had the right to revive. They could repeat His words now with a new certitude because His words were certified and guaranteed. His resurrection *confirmed* their confidence in the good news of the new era.

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That was not all. The resurrection *transformed* their gospel. Hitherto their Master had not sent them forth to preach forgiveness of sin. He Himself while on earth pronounced forgiveness, gave absolution ; but His forgiveness, so to speak, could not be separated from His personality. Only when He Himself said, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” could people believe it. But now His disciples also had a message of remission of sins to give. Why ? Not simply because their Master had died for sinners, but because His resurrection proved that His death had been accepted. It was like God’s signature on the free pardon to be proclaimed to willing hearts.

If anyone challenged these preachers, asking, “How can I know that my sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake ?” the immediate answer was, “Because God has raised Him from the dead. That proves that His sacrifice of Himself was wholly acceptable to God.” This gave the apostles their ringing certainty when they preached the gospel of forgiveness. They now could do what only their Master could do before. They could give a man absolution when he believed ; every true Christian could, because it had been demonstrated by the Resurrection that the sacrifice for sin had been approved.

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Open your eyes to this illumination of the early gospel and you will find the New Testament full of it. In Romans x. 9, the glad news is summed up thus : " If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart . . . thou shalt be saved." Believe what ? " Believe that *God raised Him from the dead.*" If any of you are doubting your salvation to-day though you acclaim Jesus as Lord, look no more at your own heart, scrutinize no longer your views of the Atonement, but look at the Risen Lord, raised from death for the forgiveness of sins. He is the proof that you may be forgiven, that all that needs to be done has been done. Therein lies the final certainty that we have a gospel of forgiveness. Jesus, in whom is the Gospel, Jesus whose death made possible a universal Gospel, has been approved. His return from death approved Him as your Saviour and as the world's Saviour. Believe that token of God's satisfaction and be glad.

### IV

In a similar fashion, the Resurrection of Jesus confirmed and transformed the conviction that the universe is ruled righteously. Without that conviction, whatever certainty I have concerning the unseen, I can have no sure hope in this

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life. If righteousness be not supreme, this is the devil's world. When Jesus died on the Cross, by an unjust verdict, it seemed as if this was the devil's world. His was perfect goodness, stainless as snow, flawless as a perfect crystal, beneficent as sunlight, and He was put to death as a criminal. That was the greatest crime the earth had seen. It was the greatest crime the earth could see. Its moral enormity was unspeakable. If that verdict had remained valid, it would have been well-nigh impossible to go on believing in the rule of righteousness.

But the Resurrection of our Lord did reverse that unjust verdict, a verdict of hate and of hopelessness. From that time, whatever experience the apostles had of injustice or brutality, their belief in the inherent righteousness of the management of the universe never wavered. When it faltered as in the apostle's case, when he felt he could not go on because things were so contrary to righteousness and peace, he had only to turn his eyes again to the shining fact of the Resurrection Day to gain reassurance.

Our Lord's death was, so to speak, the test case whether the soul of the world was just. When He was brought back from the grave, it was conclusively proved that the cause of good-

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ness does triumph. This immense confirmation of confidence in the essential justice of God's rule has never been lost. It has inspired the martyr and the reformer throughout the Christian centuries, in all moments of gloom deepening down almost to despair. They have argued thus : God's processes of justice may be delayed, but we have seen them worked out once, swift and irreversible. We can believe to see them worked out when they seem slow and hesitating.

The Resurrection did more than *confirm* this confidence in righteousness ruling mankind, it *transformed* the confidence. It conferred new knowledge. One of God's methods of conquering evil was seen to be this : evil is allowed to show itself to the full, to grow to a gigantic tyranny and to wreak its worst ; then in the moment of its apparent triumph it is blasted and overwhelmed with disgrace. As the priests and Pharisees went back to their homes on that unforgettable Good Friday, they might have said to one another as they parted : " Well, this ends the trouble. We have given Him His quietus. There will be no more hurriedly summoned meetings of the Council because of Him." But the very opposite was true. Their success was their undoing. Because they had pressed relent-

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lessly, implacably for nothing less than the death of One who was perfectly good, they were finally discredited and irremediably disgraced. The cause they had sought to crush in the bud began to flower with unimaginable swiftness.

Having seen in one clear instance God's way of working, we can believe to see it again. We can share the apostolic faith that when things look worst then God's power will be revealed. When the Roman Church is thoroughly corrupt, then comes the Reformation. When Christianity in England seems hopelessly dead, then comes the great Evangelical revival. The law of resurrection can be observed in history, following upon the divine permission to evil to do its worst in killing both hope and goodness.

Optimists may have come to take this for granted. But it was only once completely demonstrated. Jesus rose from the dead, then the deep-laid schemes of unrighteousness went awry. The crime was seen to be futile. It is the Resurrection confidence which is unquenchable confidence in every day of darkness when the death of goodness seems inevitable and the best things are crumbling.

### v

See, then, what a foundation of hopefulness

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our Lord's Resurrection is. It confirms the wistful hopes of mankind concerning another life, confirms and transforms them. It confirms the dim expectations of mankind that it must be somehow possible to acquire forgiveness from the Higher Powers. It transforms them so that there is a gospel for all, pardon for the worst of sinners. Finally it confirms the inarticulate cry of conscience that somehow righteousness will be vindicated. It confirms that confidence and transforms it so that we know that even death cannot thwart God, but gives Him a greater opportunity to reveal His power, for "He raiseth the dead."

This was the confidence that made the soul of Paul inexpugnable. Reverses, afflictions, disappointments, distresses—these could not break him. The shadow of so great a death, the dread of an imminent and enormous devastation and devitalization vanished when he rested firmly on the fact of the Resurrection. He cries in triumph : "From so great a death He has rescued me, He still rescues. I have set my hope on Him that He will rescue me." This is the faith that conquers the world. We can share it when we drink from the same fountain. Easter Day calls us to it.



IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE

BY H. MALDWYN HUGHES, D.D.  
Principal of Wesley House, Cambridge

*“Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it.”—Acts ii, 24.*

## It Was Not Possible

*Because it was not possible.* That is a stupendous assertion. Peter does not say simply that Death did not hold Christ, but that it could not hold Him. That was a bold statement to make, in view of the history of Death in the world. From the beginning Death has lorded it over man as tyrant and as conqueror. He waits relentlessly at the end of the path for every one of us. The path may be long or short, but when we reach the end of it, Death grips us tenaciously and never lets us go. Those who go from us pass from our sight, as though swallowed in a great abyss. Countless generations have gone that way, and not a solitary individual has ever come back to tell us what Death will do with us, when it has made us captive. They have all gone to a "bourne whence no traveller returns."

But in face of all the experience of our race, Peter says of Jesus Christ, "It was not possible for Death to hold Him." He is not content to say, "Christ rose from the dead." What he says

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in effect is : " Being who He was and what He was, He was bound to rise from the dead."

"Alpha of the Plough" in one of his essays, tells of a soldier whom he met in the days of the War, who was obsessed by the belief that Kitchener was still alive, and would yet come to his country's aid. "I can't never believe that he's dead," he said. "I can't do it. No, I can't believe it. Stands to reason."

It is an inadequate illustration. It does not go far enough, and yet it suggests a great deal. Peter had lived in intimate fellowship with Jesus. He knew that the very life of God was in Him. He could not think of that Personality, so abounding in creative energy, as dead. He says in effect, "It stands to reason that Death could not hold Him." He was not speculating or making a bold guess. He had seen his risen Lord and had spoken with Him. And yet his faith seems to rest on deeper grounds than sight or speech. He does not say, "Jesus is alive. I have seen Him." No, he says, "Jesus is alive. It stands to reason that it was not possible for Death to hold him."

(1) *Death cannot quench the torch of a great spirit.*

"Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," said Jesus. 'The great

## It was Not Possible

spirit never dies. His body may be burned or buried, but his soul goes marching on, fighting new battles and winning new victories.

The story of our race is the story of its great men. Name them over, and you have portrayed in miniature the spiritual history of mankind. If you are going to tell their story, it is not enough to recount the things they said and did and were while here on earth. You must go further and tell of the influences which they have left behind them. The whole history of the Christian Church is part of the biography of Paul. The history of all the Reformed Churches is part of the biography of Luther. Such men as these are beacon-lights of history not merely because they lightened their own generation, but because they illumine the pathway of all the generations which follow them. The torch of the great spirit burns on, long after his body has crumbled into dust.

That is why the past always lives again in the present. You cannot split history up into periods, each self-dependent and self-contained. The different periods of history are as real a unity as are the different parts of a stream. The influences of a good life are borne along by the stream into new regions of space and time. The good man never dies.

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The Hebrew Prophets passed from off this mortal stage many centuries ago, but it is absurd to think of them as conquered by Death. They are still sources of influence and of inspiration. Men still turn to them for strength and guidance. Their words are not mere echoes from a dead past ; they are instinct with life and energy and power. Read Isaiah, for instance, and you feel the power of a personality, not the mere influence of words.

You will have noted how in times of individual or national stress, we are wont to comfort and strengthen ourselves by recalling the great names of the past. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews takes his readers into a Westminster Abbey not made with hands, and summons up before their minds the great heroes of faith. " Seeing then," he says, " that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." *Witnesses*, not mere forerunners and exemplars, not mere onlookers and spectators, but those who, from the unseen, testify to their children and children's children of the eternal realities of faith.

(2) *This is true of Jesus Christ in a supreme degree and in a unique sense.*

I have been speaking in the main of what is

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called posthumous influence. What can be said of the great spirits of our race can be said of Jesus Christ. We Christians believe that we can say a great deal more of Him, but that need not blind us to what belongs to Him in common with all the great servants of God. His influence lives on in the world, but more than that, *He Himself* lives on in the world in *personal* presence and power. It is absurd to associate death with Jesus. The dread tyrant could have no power over one who was filled with the very life of God. It was not possible for Death to hold Him. He appeared to His disciples and held converse with them, and His parting words as He withdrew from their sight, but not from their fellowship, were : " Lo, I am with you always, even unto the consummation of the age."

To Jesus and Him alone can Matthew Arnold's words be applied with literal truth :

" Ye move through the ranks, recall the stragglers,  
Refresh the outworn, praise, re-inspire the brave "

Ye fill up the gaps in our files,  
Strengthen the wavering lines."

The early Christians preached Jesus and the resurrection. That was the burden of their message. Their first concern was not to make men assimilate the moral precepts of the Sermon on

the Mount, but to make them realize that Jesus was alive and would enter into a redeeming and abiding fellowship with them. At first sight, it is rather perplexing to us that they did not begin by enforcing the moral demands of Christ. We are puzzled that Paul seems to say so little about them and so much about life "in Christ Jesus." But after a time we begin to understand that Paul was right. If we live in fellowship with Christ we shall have the mind of Christ, and we shall understand what is His will, and we shall have strength to obey. The moral precepts of Jesus are stars set in the firmament, and they help us to shape our course ; but surer than even the light of the stars is the guidance of the unseen Pilot who dwells in our hearts and who will bring us to our desired haven.

This is the inmost secret of the Christian life. Jesus lives. It was not possible for death to hold Him. He is Lord of the invisible and of the visible, and for Him there are no intervening barriers or closed doors. He is the Christ who reigns on high and He is Christ *in us* "the hope of glory."

The world is continually bearing unconscious testimony to the reality of the living presence and power of Jesus Christ. We are wont to



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celebrate the centenaries of great men, in order that we may call them more clearly to memory, and may drink anew of their inspiration. But no one suggested at the beginning of this century that we should celebrate the nineteenth centenary of the birth of Jesus Christ. It would have been absurd. Jesus was not born in the first century merely. He is born anew in human hearts in every century.

The American Methodists have erected a statue of Francis Asbury, the great apostle of American Methodism, among the great men of their nation, outside the Capitol at Washington. The figure of the flaming evangelist will be a constant reminder to the American people of the imperishable things of the Spirit. But has it ever struck you that we do not erect statues in our public places to Him who is the inspirer of every great prophet and apostle, even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Why do we not do so? Because it stands to reason that we do not. We do not need statues of the living. *Jesus is here.* We need no statue to call Him to memory and to inspire as anew. He is in our midst, in the processes of history and in our hearts—the Captain of our salvation, the author and the finisher of our faith. You will find the proof of

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this not merely in the experience of individuals, but in the history of the last nineteen centuries. Christianity has within it exhaustless, renewing power because it relies not merely on what it has inherited from the past, but on a living and loving fellowship.

Men have often read a funeral service over Christianity, but an angel has always appeared to roll away the stone. Christianity has risen with renewed strength for the conquest of the world. What is the explanation? Jesus Christ, the great Redeemer, the great Renewer, the great Pioneer is in the midst of His people, and the cleansing, transforming and uplifting influences which are streaming forth from Him in every age are changing the face of the world. He moves through the ranks, encouraging, inspiring and strengthening, leading the hosts of God to victory.

It was not possible for Death to hold Him. His tomb was empty. Every tomb in which He is buried is empty. The tombs in which men bury the noble causes inspired by Him are empty. And, if we cling fast to Him, our tombs will be empty. All things will be ours—life and death, the present and the future, height and depth, because we are Christ's and Christ is God's.

“It stands to reason.”

# THE RESURRECTION OF THE JUST

BY T. A. LACEY, M.A., F.S.A.

Canon of Worcester

*“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.”*

*Acts ii, 27.*

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WE say in the Creed that the Lord Jesus, having died on the Cross, descended into hell. The language is obviously symbolic, derived from the idea, found in many parts of the world and notably among the Hebrews of the Old Testament, that the souls of the dead are detained in subterranean mansions. You are not to confuse this idea with belief in the immortality of the soul, for these souls are thought of as dead, though not altogether deprived of conscious existence ; they are dead, and indeed buried, as truly as the bodies from which they have departed. The same word, *Sheol*, served in Hebrew for the mansions of dead souls and for the grave in which a dead body was laid. The English word *Hell* has exactly the same history and meaning as the Hebrew *Sheol* in the former sense, and so we use it in the Bible and in the Creed, though it has been twisted into other meanings elsewhere. Most of us no longer think of those underground chambers,

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even as objects of imagination, and so the word has become purely symbolic. You know how we can speak of the grave in the same way. Hell and the grave are alike symbolic. They symbolize a reality ; and that which they symbolize is death.

Death : the mystery which we are always encountering at close quarters, and yet it remains mysterious. Death is our horizon ; our experience teaches so far ; beyond we can see nothing. But is that so ? When I was travelling in the Mediterranean some years ago, we distinctly saw one night the magnificent light at Carthage. According to our reckoning we were at least twenty miles north of the farthest point from which it is visible, and our navigators would have been at a loss but for the fact that all the previous day we had been seeing mirage in the south, figures of shadowy ships, one of them inverted in the air. So they guessed—and the event proved them right—that the refraction of mirage had lifted the lighthouse above the horizon. Is there any way of lifting into sight what lies below the horizon of death ? Some say that there is ; you will have heard of the methods of Spiritism, and perhaps you have tried them ; I will not say anything about them

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now, except that they appear to be not unlike the mirage, which sometimes throws real objects above the horizon, usually distorts them, and often pictures what has no existence. That is a poor sort of information. What we Christians claim to have is better ; we believe that One has returned from beyond the horizon.

What is death ? The loss of life. You are a living body : and you can distinguish uncertainly between the life and the body that lives. So we come to think of soul and body. You know that the life, the soul, can leave the body ; that this will certainly happen to you, and then you will be dead. Can you think of yourself as dead ? It is not an easy thing to do, and so death remains a mystery. But what you can get clear is that you yourself will be dead. Do not try to think of the body as dying, while the soul still lives. The soul means the life of the body. The separation of soul and body is the death of the whole, of yourself, soul and body. What becomes of the dead body we know fairly well ; what becomes of the dead soul—that is below the horizon.

When we say in the Creed that the Lord Jesus died, was buried, and descended into hell, we are affirming the reality of His death in this

double aspect. That is undoubtedly the reason why the words were put into the Creed ; they were directed against a widespread refusal to believe that He shared to the uttermost our common lot. The rumour that He had been seen alive after His passion might raise a doubt, and in the first proclamation of the Gospel of the Resurrection emphasis was laid on the reality. St. Peter seized on familiar words of a psalm as applicable : “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.” There are the two aspects of the reality : the soul in hell, the body in the grave. Jesus had endured death in its completeness.

But only for a moment. Jesus suffered death, but His disciple cries triumphantly, “It was not possible that He should be holden of it.” The Gospel was now become the good news of His resurrection. But what is resurrection ? It is intelligible only as the undoing of the effect of death ; and, if death is the parting of soul and body, a disintegration of our human nature, resurrection means a reintegration. Belief in the resurrection is utterly unlike a belief in the continuance of the soul apart. That would be at the best a maimed humanity. St. Paul put



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aside such a condition as a kind of nakedness. We may groan, he says, under the burden of the flesh as it now is, but "not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon." It is difficult to express in English that notion of a richer, superior clothing, which he elsewhere describes as the corruptible putting on incorruption, the mortal assuming immortality. Resurrection means the reunion of separated soul and body in glorious completeness.

That is our hope in face of inevitable death. The assurance of it was given by the resurrection of Jesus, when hell could not detain His soul, nor the grave reduce His flesh to loathsome corruption. We must not make the empty sepulchre the essential fact of the Resurrection. As the Lord, living among men, had shed the daily waste of His body, so He might certainly have shed what remained from the Cross, leaving it in the closed sepulchre, and rising clothed upon with the body of His glory. But that was not the way of His resurrection, as it may be of ours, and it is easy to see why the wisdom of God ordained it otherwise. It is almost inconceivable that any of those who had seen Him die should have believed that He was risen from death, if the crucified body had not

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inexplicably disappeared from the sepulchre. His palpable appearances to the disciples afterwards, His "handle me and see," are expressly said to be designed for evidence. The reality of the Resurrection is something more.

Does the fact of resurrection seem to you important? Does the hope of it appeal to you? If not, I think it must be because you underestimate the importance of the fact of death. Attempts are being commonly made to whittle this away; there is light and irresponsible talk about "passing into the next room." When you come to die, you yourself will not pass into any next room or distant room. A separated soul, said St. Thomas Aquinas, is not the Self, and I do not know how there can be any escape from that. It is a fragment of a disintegrated self. This disintegration is in view when we make death a figurative description of sin, for sin is a breaking down, a disintegration of character. It is no far-fetched idea that the one is in some measure a consequence of the other, that the wages of sin is death. If you are inclined to think lightly of death, turn your thoughts to Gethsemane, see the Saviour of the world sore amazed and very heavy, His soul sorrowful even unto death. If you get the significance of that,

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I think you will at least desire a hope of resurrection.

But resurrection is so far off ! Is that so ? At the time of the Gospel, some Jews nursed an uncertain hope of resurrection at the very end of the world, and this has seriously affected Christian thought. You will remember Martha of Bethany. When the Master tells her that her brother shall rise again, she replies : “ I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” It is a commonplace of Jewish piety. But the Master gently rebukes her. At the last day ? “ I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” The evangelist certainly means you to read that in connection with another saying of the Master : “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God ; and they that hear shall live.” There may be others of whom it is said, “ I will raise him up at the last day,” but for some at least now is the hour of resurrection.

You may read in the Gospel according to St. Matthew a very strange story how, after our Lord's crucifixion, “ the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened,

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and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Very few writers about the Gospel have cared to enlarge on that story, and I admire their reticence ; if I refer to it, I do so only because of a certain coherence that it has with a belief about resurrection which you will find expressed in other parts of the writings of the New Testament. There seems to have been a wavering adherence to the Jewish hope of a deferred resurrection at the last day ; but you must remember that a very speedy arrival of that day was expected. In one of his earliest epistles, the first to the Thessalonians, St. Paul wrote in the old style of apocalyptic imagery : " The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first ; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Two things only I ask you to notice ; first, St. Paul was persuaded that he himself would probably live to see the day ; secondly, to be " with the Lord " is to be in the state of resurrection. You will see in a

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moment why I ask you to note that. But now think of St. Paul twenty years later. He is in prison at Rome, daily expecting sentence of death. He writes to his friends at Philippi that he hardly knows whether he would like to escape that death. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain . . . for I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better ; nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." You see there is no longer any thought of a deferred resurrection ; he is sure that, for him, to die is to be with Christ, and that, we have seen, is to be in the state of resurrection.

This belief, so confidently held by St. Paul, appears again in the Apocalypse of John. First you have the vision of the Two Witnesses, slain in the streets of the great city, which may be an obscure reference to the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul at Rome. Their dead bodies lie for three days and a half in the street ; then "the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet . . . and they ascended up to heaven in a cloud." What is here obscurely hinted becomes explicit in the later vision of the First Resurrection : "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded

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for the witness of Jesus . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." The meaning of that can hardly be mistaken. For other men there may be a general resurrection at the last day ; after a thousand years—and a millennium stands in the language of prophecy for any long period—the rest of the dead may live ; but for the martyrs there is no delay. They, blessed and holy, have part in the first resurrection, they live and reign with Christ. It is precisely what St. Paul was confidently expecting.

This is your hope of resurrection. Grasp it, and the resurrection will not be for you a remote event in which you are hardly interested. It is immediate. You will not confine the privilege of the First Resurrection to those who were actually beheaded for the witness of Jesus. There are other ways in which souls are perfected in Christ. Your hope is that the souls of the departed when so perfected—by what working of the grace of God, you know not—will straightway pass to a joyful resurrection, to be ever with the Lord. Look for this yourself in trembling hope.

## **The Resurrection of the Just**

When you pray for those whom you mourn, do not ask only that they may rest in peace, which may seem to be a state of unconscious idleness. Ask also for their deliverance from the gates of hell, and from the corruption of the grave ; pray that they may come, soon, to the Resurrection of the Just.





THE VEIL AS GOSSAMER

BY NORMAN MACLEAN, D.D.

Edinburgh

“ *Jesus saith unto her, Mary.*”

St. John xx, 16.

## The Veil as Gossamer

BETWEEN Friday night and Sunday morning, nineteen centuries ago, the most momentous event in the history of the world occurred. We may differ as to the nature of the event ; we cannot but agree as to its world-transforming power. On Friday night the disciples and the Holy Women resigned themselves to the victory of all-conquering death. They could think of nothing but how to provide for rendering the last duty of love to the dead body of their Master—and out of that grave came, unexpectedly, unlooked for, the life and power that changed the band of mourners into a joyous and a triumphing host. Death and the grave have ever been the end : here they are the glorious beginning.

Now on this Easter morning let us try humbly and reverently, conscious of the mystery encompassing us which no eye can pierce, to realize what happened. St. Mark tells us that He appeared first to Mary Magdalene—with all the old love and old tenderness uncongealed by

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the chill tomb. Her name on His lips—Mary—has rung through the centuries as a trumpet proclaiming that death cannot halt the onward march of the host of God.

### I

Surely this woman, to whom His first word was spoken that made sable death luminous, cannot but capture the imagination.

She came from Magdala on the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret. We must not confound her with the woman who is called a sinner. Early in our Lord's ministry she met him. She was a poor neurotic woman, the victim of delusions, shunning the haunts of men ; tormented by alternate frenzy and brooding silence. A modern physician has diagnosed her condition as that of " a woman whose personality had been disintegrated or disrupted, and whose mind was a battleground of forces released from her lower self, all control gone." It was the condition which was described in the picturesque language of a primitive age as being possessed by demons. That her case was grievous is shown by the number of demons that were supposed to haunt her. Then suddenly she comes in touch with Jesus. The dynamic power of His personality, the mesmeric

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force that He irradiated, scattered her gloom and brought the streams of healing vitality into her soul. There are multitudes of strange people in the world who will sit credulous in the dark believing that the legs of a table can be vitalized and set gyrating round a room ; but when you tell them that a glorious personality such as Jesus could vitalize a nervous wreck into new life, they look at you with pitying eyes. That is what Jesus did to Mary of Magdala. He told her of the Father, and how the world was not a demon-haunted graveyard but the shrine of His love and His mercy. Fear died within her. " I too am a daughter of God and He loves me," she said to herself one day, and it was as if she had risen from the dead. The change was such that they said it was as if seven demons had left her. And her heart clung to Jesus for He had snatched her as from the charnel-house.

When you realize that story you will understand what was in the heart of Mary as she stood with the Holy Mother over against the Cross and watched. He had saved her : and now she was powerless to save Him. She watched through all the six hours ; and when Mary of Magdala, Mary the Mother of Joses, and Nicodemus laid Him in the grave, she watched still. When

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the stone was rolled across the entrance and the tomb was sealed, she felt as if her own heart lay buried there.

When the Sabbath was over she was the first at the tomb with the spices. She would at least have that comfort—the comfort of ministering the last rites of love. The empty tomb mocked her. The others go away but she lingers. Again and again she comes to the little window and looks into the dark tomb. There is nothing there. She turns round hearing the question, “Why weepest thou?” and lo! a man confronts her. “Whom seekest thou?” He asks, and she thought He was the gardener. There is a depth of grief which numbs all the faculties. The eye blinded by weeping, and the ear dulled by the ache of the heart, cannot see, cannot hear aright. The depth of her grief is shown by her failing to recognize . . . “Mary,” He says, lingering on the word. With the joyous cry, “My Master,” she throws herself down at His feet. It is the ecstasy of love born out of despair. . . .

And as you see it, remembering what lay behind: the soul of the woman reborn: the life that owed everything to Jesus . . . you understand that adoring cry. . . . And you will

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never be able to say " My Master " as Mary said it on this or any other Easter Day until you too have had that living touch with Christ which means a life risen from the dust. It is only those who know what it is to be forgiven of God, to be made to live by His Spirit, for whom an eternity of wonders has dawned, hearing His voice saying : " Son and Daughter of God ! " —only they can hail the Lord of life on Easter morn with the fire of adoration in the heart and the rapture of praise on the lips. When we remember what the Lord has wrought : then shall we praise and adore !

### II

But it is on Jesus that our eyes are this day fixed. He comes back from the valley of shadows and lo ! He is still the same.

What changes He underwent we know not. That He came back cannot be doubted. Indeed I do not see how it could be otherwise. For it would be a very queer and intolerable world in which Caiaphas and Pilate were left triumphing and Jesus was left with a mangled body in a sealed tomb. That would be a world ruled by folly. After all we have reason to believe that Intelligence rules the universe, and that

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Righteousness is throned at the core of things. If that be so, then surely the end of Jesus of Nazareth could not be as a clod of the valley trampled under the heel. That was the feeling of the early Christians who knew Him. Death could not hold such an one. It was inevitable that God should raise Him up. . . . That most wondrous Personality must still persist. And as He stands confronting Mary, saying, "Whom seekest thou?" and we hear Him say "Mary!" there comes the overwhelming impression that He is still alive: that He still gives life and power and inspiration. "My Master" . . . And nineteen centuries have verified it so.

What Jesus did to Mary was to bring home to her heart that death cannot sever. She thought death impassable: and here He was with the old love, and the selfsame voice and the familiar tenderness. Mary was the first of a multitude innumerable who have seen and heard Him so. Socrates held high discourse of immortality . . . but Mary could never understand anything of that. . . . But now she sees the Master: the torch of immortality is lighted that ere long illumined the world. And the men in the fields and in the mines said: "Jesus lives: we are immortal."

As we look at Jesus with eyes of love like



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Mary's, and think of the change He wrought, we cannot sit silent. What a change He has made ! Think of a world in which all roads lead to the grave—and think of the world you know : the temple of all-conquering Life. My Master ! The joyous message of Easter is this, that in the twilight of this life we have an inheritance with the Saints in light.

### III

“ *Touch Me not* ” is His admonition as Mary in rapture tries to clasp His feet. . . .

There is an intellectual arrogance which would tabulate the attributes of God as an entomologist would analyse an insect. . . . The mystery of life ! Let us never approach the Eternal with the easy familiarity of greeting an acquaintance ! . . . The old familiar intercourse is ended. It cannot be renewed. She must know Him henceforth as soul holding converse with soul. His presence must henceforth be to her as the undying Spirit.

Touch Me not ! Well may the words ring in the ears of such as think that familiarity is the only true note of religion. Slovenly speech and ungracious familiarity are not synonymous with godliness.

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## IV

We come back to it : that dear name, *Mary*. As we hear it we feel that the veil separating the seen from the unseen has become thin as a web dew-woven. We know ourselves to be individual hearts, dear as if none existed but just we. It might well make us wonder that Jesus could have gone through all that, and that He should come back with the familiar name of a once neurotic woman on His lips : *Mary* !

It is so also on this Easter Day.

We believe that Jesus is with His people everywhere to-day : for the Spirit of Jesus is just the Spirit of God, and God is everywhere. . . . But we think of God as beholding us in the mass : as looking on this congregation and seeing a thousand people as one sees a crowd. Not so. It is not in the mass that God sees us, but as separate individuals, each of us more valuable than all the treasures of Golconda—for each is a separate entity with none other like us. Just as Jesus sees the one woman and says “ *Mary* ” with infinite love : so God sees each separate heart here and knows all about us. He knows how *Mary* sitting over there has to help an ailing mother, sacrificing the pleasures of life she

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longs for, at times with rebellious tears. He knows. And all about Jean and the wages she gets, and how much of it she spends on her dress and on her amusements, and how little she gives her struggling parents. He knows. And about John who goes about the city with a rebellious heart looking for work and finding none, with care so black on his brow that he sometimes says : " There is no God, or if there is, He doesn't care ! " And about Peter who is in the far country, but has come by force of habit to the church to-day away from the swine troughs . . . to sing the old hymns. He knows. And about Andrew who has read up a little second-hand knowledge and who will tell you that God is a myth and immortality a fable. . . . for he himself has proved it ! The universe is to a worm only what the worm can make of it. And the heart of the All Father has a special tenderness for the little worms who prove to each other that the clod in which they wriggle is all the universe there is. And about John Smith and his wife who have come to the church on this Easter Day, with an ache in the heart, thinking of the sons who once sat beside them drinking the chalice of the grapes of God, and who will never more return nor see their native country !

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Each separately God sees and God knows all about, and God yearns over, and to each He says : “ As I live, ye My children shall live also. Death can have no dominion over you. Peace be unto you.”

Oh ! to hear it now deep in our hearts as we take in our hands the sacred elements. “ Mary.” Listen ! There’s your own very name whispered in your ear . . . Mary . . . Jean . . . George . . . “ Seek Me who turn the shadow of death into morning ! The Lord is My Name.” . . . As we kneel here and adore, truly the veil between us and the dead becomes thin as gossamer.

THE MAGDALENE AND THE MASTER

By GEORGE H. MORRISON, D.D.

Glasgow

*“ The Magdalene and the Master ”*

John xx. 1-18.

## The Magdalene and the master

OF Mary Magdalene and her life-story we know comparatively little. One or two brief references in the gospels exhaust the information we possess. That she had been in the grip of seven demons and given back to womanhood by Christ—that she had followed Him from place to place and ministered to Him of her substance—that she had been with the Mother at the cross, and then had lingered by the garden grave—that is practically everything we know. But sometimes in the crowded street we see a face that we never can forget. We see it only for a single moment, and yet it haunts the memory for years. And so the face of Mary Magdalene, seen as it were for an instant in the passing, has haunted the memory of Christian centuries. Art has found in her a favourite subject : she looks on us from many a noble picture. Legend has woven many a tale around her that the world would not willingly let die. Poetry has been wakened by the Magdalene—colleges have been

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dedicated to her—many an erring woman lies to-day in the institutions distinguished by her name. All that this morning we may leave aside and confine our attention to the gospel story. We shall dwell for a little this Easter morning on the happiest and brightest hour of Mary's life. For when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week He appeared first to Mary Magdalene. Now have you ever thought why He appeared to *her* first? I shall indicate three reasons for that precedence. Firstly it was because she needed Him so much; secondly because she grieved for Him so much; and thirdly because she loved Him so much.

First, then, our Lord appeared to Mary thus because she needed Him so much. Once she had been a depraved and fallen woman, and the Lord had brought her to herself again. We need not trouble to enter in detail on the question of demoniacal possession. It is enough to say that Mary had had years when she was in the grip and tyranny of sin. And how complete that domination was, and how profound the misery it caused are indicated by the perfect number seven. Once she had been a helpless woman and being helpless had been a hopeless woman. Her will was sapped—her character was gone—



## The Magdalene and the Master

she was a slave to evil and she knew it. And then in some never-to-be-forgotten hour the eyes of Jesus had seen her, and had found her, and she had seen the angel faces smile that she had loved long since and lost awhile. No apostle had had such experience. *They* had all been reputable men. They had plied their callings, revered their parents, gone to the synagogue upon the Sabbath day. But Mary had made her bed in hell ; she had gone down to unfathomable depths ; she was the woman—and everybody knew it—out of whom the Lord had cast seven devils. I do not think that even Peter felt his need of Christ so much as Mary did. After that life of hers she could not trust herself : she felt she was not safe one single hour. Only in the companionship of Christ—only when she knew that He was near—did Mary feel herself powerful to keep the purity she had been privileged to gain. That was why she followed Him so constantly. She would never leave Him for a single day. That was why when all His own forsook Him the Magdalene took her station by the Cross. That was why on resurrection morning she stole away out of the sleeping city to linger by the spot where He was laid. She was no confident and hardy soldier. She was a

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tender and a gentle woman. She remembered her-past, and all the horror of it, and the same devils were whispering to her still. And just because she needed Christ so utterly, to establish and reinforce her womanhood, He appeared to her first on resurrection morning.

And so we learn that those who need Christ most are those who may be sure of His appearing. He is never quite so near to any man as when that man has learned how weak he is. It was when Peter cried "Lord save me or I perish" that the Lord put forth His hand and held him up. It was when the servant was at the point of death that the Lord bestowed on him his life again. It was when Mary knew her womanly case was desperate, with all these passions clutching at her heart, that she found her Lord was nearer than she dreamed. When your little child is smitten with a fever, the doctor comes and pays his kindly visits. And when the child is recovering, and is convalescent, the visits may be delayed or intermittent. But should the fever heighten to delirium, and the need be urgent, as of life and death, then every other call must be delayed and the child's be the first visit in the morning. It was so with Mary on resurrection morning. It is so with

## The Magdalene and the Master

many a woman many a morning. She knows not how she shall face the day without the sustaining and the help of heaven. And the lesson of the Magdalene is this, that on such mornings, when the need is sorest, the risen Saviour is at our very hand.

The second reason why He appeared first to Mary is that Mary grieved for Him so much. It was the immediate coming of the Comforter to a grief that was too bitter for delay. That the death of Jesus had saddened all His followers we only need our human hearts to tell us. To lose a friend is always tragical, and they had lost the truest of all friends. One who had never faltered in His comradeship—one who had shown them all that life might be : one who had changed their being to the deeps. Now He was gone, and with Him went the sunshine. Darkness had settled down upon their world. They were like Rachel mourning for her children and in her sorrow refusing to be comforted. But poignant as was the grief of all of them, perhaps most poignant was the grief of Mary, a fact we may gather from such hints as these.

In the first place hers was a grief so bitter that it filled her with the desire to be alone.

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Alone we find her on resurrection morning watching, waiting, and weeping in the garden. For a brief space she is with other women bearing the spices to sprinkle on the shroud. For a brief space, hurrying to the grave, she is in the company of John and Peter. And then the other women disappear, and Peter and John go homeward to Jerusalem, and Mary is by the sepulchre alone. She could not endure company just then. She could not bear the sound of human voices. She did not want the kindest word of sympathy. She did not crave the pressure of a hand. One overmastering desire possessed her and made her oblivious of every peril : it was the deep desire for quiet solitude. That is always a mark of the most poignant grief. It is felt, it is experienced, alone. It does not crave the distraction of society. It draws apart as in a garden quietness. And we see how intense the grief of Mary was, when we find her watching and waiting and weeping thus alone, as if even the company of John and Peter were an intrusion upon the sacredness of sorrow.

Or again we may learn how bitter was her grief when we remember that it made her blind. For that same morning Christ Himself drew near to her, and she turned round and knew

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not it was Jesus. That there were several causes for that want of recognition would at once occur to every one of us. There was the dimness of the morning light, for one. There was the change in the aspect of the risen Lord. But the deepest cause is not to be found in Christ : the deepest cause is to be found in Mary, whose heavy, breaking heart had made her blind. All great passions have a blinding power. They throw as it were a veil before the eyes. Hatred does that, and love, and fear, and jealousy : they darken the vision and obscure the seeing. But neither hatred with its distorting efficacy, nor bat-like jealousy that fears the light, has a greater blinding power than poignant grief. How often it blots out the love of heaven. How often it obscures a Father's hand. How often it casts a veil upon long years so that all their radiant gladness is forgotten. And that is what grief did to Mary Magdalene. It made her blind for a little to her Saviour, as it has done to you sometimes—and done to me—when our way was by the valley of the shadow. It is no ordinary sorrow which does that. It is profound and overwhelming sorrow. It is sorrow like David's for his beloved Absalom. It is sorrow like Rachel's mourning for her

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children. And so again do we learn the grief of Mary, and how intense it was, and overwhelming, from the simple fact that it had made her blind. It was to Mary *first* that He revealed Himself. Do we not see the meaning of it now? The others were comforting each other and could wait a little: by and by He would appear to them. But Mary was alone and broken-hearted—torn by a grief that she could share with nobody—and she had the first comfort from the Lord.

Then the third reason why He came first to Mary was because she loved Him so much. To her all the evil of hell had been forgiven, and so with all the love of heaven, she loved Him. Whether the Magdalene is to be identified with that woman who was a sinner in St. Luke's gospel, is a question that never has been settled yet, and will perhaps be finally answered in the negative. But whether or not, she too had been a sinner, and Christ had saved her from degradation infinite, so that every day she lived Mary would say "I love Him because He first loved me." Think of the misery of seven devils. Think of the anguish when womanhood was gone. Think of a woman with a heart like this in the grip of all that is bestial and wretched. And then if you

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want to know her love for Christ think of all that He had done for her in setting the diadem upon her head again. Out from the very depths she had been rescued. Down to the very depths she loved her rescuer. Others might leave Him, she would never leave Him. She was at the cross whence all the rest had fled. And yet there is one other touch of love that we have to wait for till the resurrection morning, to show us how perfect was the love of Mary.

For in the dawn of resurrection morning Mary stands out apart from all the others. It was she alone with that great heart of hers who refused to believe her Lord was lost. "Then the disciples went away to their own homes"—there was nothing more to be done : the grave was empty. They had examined the sepulchre and seen the napkin there, and nothing was to be gained by senseless waiting. But Mary, though she knew what they had seen, and had not a ray of hope they did not share—Mary could not tear herself away. There is a kind of love which faces facts, and it is a noble and courageous love. It opens the eyes wide to dark realities, and bowing the head it says, "I must accept them." But there is an agony of love that does not act so : it defies hope and beats against all

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evidence. Perhaps it is only women who can love like that, and it was a love like that which filled the heart of Mary. No one will ever doubt John's love to Jesus. No one will ever doubt the love of Peter. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love Thee." Yet the fact remains that on that Easter morning Peter and John went to their homes again, and only a woman lingered by the grave. I have no doubt they urged her to go with them. They had been too long with Jesus not to be true gentlemen. It was cold and raw there, and the grass was wet, and Roman soldiers were not the safest company. But Mary simply replied, "I cannot go"—she must linger and watch in the teeth of all the facts—and I say that measured by a trait like *that*, there is no love in Scripture that outmatches Mary's. That was why the Lord appeared to Mary first. It was the swift response of heaven to such fine love. Eye had not seen and ear had never heard the things that God had prepared for her who loved Him. And if "we love Him too," as the hymn puts it, we may be sure He is not far away, where the empty grave is, and the garden flowers, and the sunshine of another Easter morning.



AN EASTER DOXOLOGY

BY JAMES REID, M.A.  
Eastbourne

*“ Blessed be God who hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead.”—1 Peter i, 3.*

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EASTER morning is one of those occasions that hold the spirit of joy even for those who do not reflect upon the spiritual fact. It is like Christmas Day; the veriest pagan cannot help being overtaken by a wave of the spirit from out of the mighty deep. We are churlish indeed and chill hearted if the day does not awaken some kind of spring-song in the soul.

There are many people, however, to whom the Resurrection story brings a faint tinge of hope, but that is all. It is a beautiful and mysterious dream for them that Christ rose from the dead; it is poetry touching the imagination. It is hope flung up in glowing colours against the background of disaster like a rainbow in the sky, but without any basis of reality among the facts of life. That is how some people look on it.

Many are not sure when they are reading these narratives that their feet are on solid ground. Perhaps they feel it does not matter much whether this story is true or not. It is

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at least a symbol of truth and even so it comforts our hearts. That is not a position in which the mind can rest. We want something more. And it is not a position in which we need to rest. There is a far more solid ground for us than the quaking pathway of a dream. There is historical rock on which we can set our feet—the experience of these men who made up the early Church. It is hardly possible to imagine a more depressed and discouraged group of men than the disciples after the crucifixion. They were like an army, routed in irretrievable disaster, in which the panic passion lays hold of every one to escape and hide himself. The ecclesiastical and military forces of the world had made a great offensive against the little band, which had ended for the disciples in a perfect collapse of morale. They had no message and no heart. Everything was shattered—their faith in God, their faith in Christ, the dream which had awakened in the company of Christ. They had lost everything. Yet in a few days we find them compact, united, strong, exultant, facing the world with a message which rang through the city like a trumpet, and they went out to bid sick men arise and lame men walk. As a writer in the Times Literary Supplement put it, “These few days made such a

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change in the minds and the power of a handful of Jews that in a few decades they had planted their faith all over the Roman Empire." How are we to account for the difference? Something must have happened big enough to bring about the change, enough to alter their whole outlook towards the past and the future. It will not do merely to dismiss the Resurrection because it is a miracle, for this change is a miracle just as great. Is it not best just to let the disciples tell their own story? Listen to Peter: he describes the change that came over them as a rebirth. These men had been reborn. "Blessed be God who hath begotten us again unto a living hope." They were brought out of darkness into light. The light that had gone out of their souls had been rekindled by a divine act. How was this accomplished? What was this divine act which had requickened their souls into hope and power? It was the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The risen Christ had wrought the miracle. The light of His face had touched the dying torch to flame. He had come back and renewed the love and faith which the crucifixion had stamped out. The darkness had gone, because somehow, the Sun had risen; and all was bright because He was there. "Blessed be God who hath

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begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead."

Let us think of this experience and ask more particularly how it was that their hope had been rekindled. It is a secret we want to know. For when hope is dead, all is dead. When the lamp of hope goes out, life loses its spring and its joy. Courage is good, but courage without hope has no real roots. Patience is good, but patience without hope is mere undiluted suffering. "Faith" says Tertullian, "is patience with the lamp lit," but that lighted lamp makes all the difference. "A living hope," a hope which is dashed to the ground only to rise again in some brighter, purer form—that is the kind of hope we need amid the disappointments and the bafflements of life. How do we get it, what is its basis, its foundation? That is our first question. What is the vital element in this undying hope, in which we are "baffled to fight better, sleep to wake"? And how did the Resurrection of Christ produce it?

The basis of this hope is a vision of God, a message about God. The root of all great qualities is a true religion. The secret of all right thinking and right feeling is the truth about God. And it was just here first of all that the disciples had

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lost their hope, when Jesus died. Before Christ came, the Jewish nation had had a great hope in God. That was the very core of their religion, God was going to visit them and redeem them. The Messiah was to come and restore the Kingdom to Israel, as they put it. They meant that in some great stroke of His power He was going to vindicate their faith in Him, work His vengeance on their foes and set His own people in a place of triumphant empire. You can read this hope in the messages of the prophets, and Jesus, it seemed to the disciples, had countersigned it, He had taken up this hope and made it, so to speak, His battle cry, His marching song. "The Kingdom of God is at hand," these were the first words with which He sounded His message to His time. The disciples believed it, and in this faith in God they had rallied to His standard. Day after day they watched for it, utterly trusting Him. For Himself, He had risen out of this merely material hope in God into something spiritual and pure. It was not an *earthly* Kingdom He had come to set up, but a *spiritual* kingdom in which men's hearts would be won by love—not coerced by force or fear, and in which God comes into His world as we let Him into our hearts. That was the germ of

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His teaching on the Mount. But in spite of all He could do, the hearts of these disciples could not quite take it in. They were too full of old ideas. Their hope was too hard set in the old mould of a militant Messiah, ruling from a throne, to take in the vision of a suffering Saviour, ruling by love and winning men by His grace. As He went on His way, and the storm clouds gathered, and resentment and hatred rolled up from the angry world to burst on Him in the Cross, He told them what would happen, but they could not take it in. "This be far from Thee, Lord," said Peter, when He spoke of the Cross, "this shall not be unto Thee." They could not see. Their faith in God would not stand the strain of so great a change. And they went on with Him towards Jerusalem, still hoping that in some way God would break in and show His power. And nothing happened. Bit by bit on that awful road with the cloud still gathering they followed Him, right through Gethsemane, where they were dazed with the mystery of it all, and on to Calvary, where the storm finally burst, in what seemed to them irretrievable disaster. And still God did nothing. Can we not understand it? Have we not said the same thing, when some calamity broke upon us, and some wild outburst of cruelty



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or vice threatened to sweep away the little house of faith in which we had dwelt so happily, and showed us the dangerous world in which we live. Where is God all this time? we asked. Here is the purest soul that ever lived, the man who trusted God as no other has ever trusted Him, and cruel hands take Him and set Him on a Cross, and nothing happens! The world conquers. Sin is master of the situation. The facts of life show no glimmering of any activity of God. So when Christ died their faith was shattered, their hope in God was eclipsed. For the moment, so far as they were concerned, it was all over with them. The ancient perplexity about the suffering of the world blotted out all sense of the goodness and love of God. How pathetic it all is. "We trusted that it should have been He which had redeemed Israel, and this is the third day since these things have happened."

You can see their hope oozing away till it was gone and all was utterly dark. The face of God was covered with a pall of gloom. The Cross had challenged their faith and it broke; it was a question for which they had no answer. Calvary was the end of everything for them. Once again they had been disappointed, like the Prophets and the Psalmists. Oh, the darkness

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of it ! How many of us have been down in it ! That old problem is as keen to-day as it was then. I cannot understand why this calamity has come to me—you will hear one say. I have always tried to do my duty. Why is it that I should be called on to suffer so much if God is good ? It is the old problem and there are people whose faith will not stand the strain. The reason, of course, is that it is not the New Testament faith at all ; it is the Old Testament faith, the belief that prosperity must follow a righteous life and that goodness must have its material rewards, and that God must reveal Himself to their advantage in the field of business or the comfort of home. But meantime faith lies like a house with crumbled foundations which only waits the slow decay of nature to become a ruin and fade into nothingness. So it was with the disciples. Then came the Resurrection—Christ rose from the dead. He appeared to them again in His old power and love, even stronger than before. And at once the spark of faith in God was rekindled.

Two things had happened. Their confidence in God was restored. God had acted ; He had not allowed the Cross to be the last word. He had responded to the faith of Jesus. The heart that cried “ Father ” in that hour of darkness

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before the light of day was quenched, had heard a voice replying "My Son," and at the sound of it had risen from the dead. God had not left them after all; He was still the Lord of the Universe. His was still the last word and it was a word of victory. It was a great restoration of confidence in God. The long patience of the centuries was rewarded. Behind the silence of the unseen, God was working.

But a second thing had happened. Their faith was not only reborn after it had been broken to pieces in the shattering Cross. It rose to life in a new form. It was not the old faith rekindled. It was a new creation. It had changed its shape. A new vision of God rose radiant from the ashes of their old belief—a faith which could meet the hardest and cruellest facts of life. Up to this point the one dark cloud upon their vision of God was the fact of suffering and defeat. How could God permit suffering to those He loved? How could He stand by and do nothing while His own were buffeted and scorned by the cruel blows of evil? The Cross had solved that enigma. For it came to them as they thought of Christ passing through His agony, that God the Father was there all the time. He was in it all, manifesting Himself in that patient, suffering, forgiving

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love. That wonderful light that shone in Jesus was the glory of God. If you had asked the disciples they would have answered like the martyr girl of Scotland, when the waters rose about the patient, triumphant form of her sister, whom they were doing to death for her faith, "Whom do I see but God struggling there, for He sendeth no man a warfare at his own charges." Suffering at the hands of evil is no dark cloud upon the face of God. It is the background of opportunity in which He can reveal the radiance of His presence. Not by any material triumph over evil in which His foes are crushed does God win His victory, but in a mighty love which meets evil with patience, and hatred with kindness, and wrong with forgiveness. There is God's triumph—His amazing and unconquerable activity. Like the dawn breaking out of the night and chasing the shadows, the risen Christ dispelled for ever for those who saw Him the ancient darkness of pain and sin ; and the old, sad world with its seeming tragedies was love-lit through and through. With Him now they could face anything. "Blessed be God who hath begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead."

Now this rekindled hope which was born of

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a new vision of God's love flung its beams into every region of their life, and so it does for us to-day.

It lit up, for one thing, the region of their personal lives where they struggled with failure and temptation for the prize of character. Before the Cross they had broken down hopelessly in loyalty and courage. They all forsook Him and fled. They broke faith with their Lord, especially Peter. He had gone further than the rest, just because it was his temperament to outrun them in everything. They felt they could hardly lift their heads again. And just when they were down and out, and on the point of giving up this high way of life as an impossible dream, He came back to them and revealed to them a love which was supreme and victorious over all failure—a love in whose presence there is no final defeat for the soul, and through whose forgiveness and persistence the broken strands of will are reknit into power and the fatal weakness of the flesh is finally conquered and swept clean away. The whole region of our moral struggle is lit with hope. That is the great thing to know. The fight for character is not a hopeless battle in the presence of the living Christ. The recreant weakness which betrays us to our

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downfall and humbling, like a faulty muscle when the strain comes on, need not remain to trip us up. The love that endured the rough handling of evil, even to the death, survives to conquer evil in the hearts of men and lift them through His friendship into His likeness. Here is a gospel for sin-baffled men. Look into your own hearts and you will find that where we fail is very often not want of will but want of hope. The will is drugged and doomed by the memory of its own impotence. And the impotence remains because we dwell in the atmosphere of our own failure and do not lift our eyes to the amazing wonder of God's unconquerable love, rising from a grave where sin has struck Him down and wrought its very worst upon Him, to love us, and reaching out to us in that undying friendship the power to rise into His likeness. Let us open our souls to this amazing love, and the iron gates which shut us out from victory will swing back to set us free.

And this hope lights up the whole region of our sacrifices for others and for the Kingdom. There is nothing surer than that the way of service will demand its price. There will be many a defeat to face in which it seems that all our efforts are baffled and we have to spend

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our strength in vain. The religion of service is a land of lost causes. It is filled with the graves of many an apparent defeat. Think of the men who have given their lives for Jesus Christ without producing any effect worth speaking about so far as we can see. Read the story of any great foreign missionary enterprise. It is a long catalogue, especially at first, of lives laid down and money spent in what the world calls a gigantic waste of power. When Dr. Laws of Livingstonia began his work the first five years seemed a ghastly failure. Heathendom swept across his track and blotted out, as it seemed, the very traces of it. His biographer tells us that the results were tabulated thus : "Liabilities,—five European graves ; five years' expenditure, £20,000 ; five years' hardship and toil. Assets,—one convert and one abandoned mission station." And there are lives laid down as surely where the price demanded is not very heavy, but just as real. The task of faith is from one point of view a kind of forlorn hope. The evils against which we fight seem to have a tremendous power of resistance. The ancients knew it and gave us the legend about the dragon with many heads, where, when one was struck off, a dozen sprang up in its place. Even Christ

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seemed to make far more enemies than He made friends. So far as we can gather from a reading of the gospels, if we stop at the Cross, He did little more than rouse the heart of evil to a storm of fury, in which He was overwhelmed. So it is always. And there are hours of darkness when the better world, which is the kingdom of God, seems a forlorn dream. But then comes the Resurrection; and the meaning of it is the assurance of victory in death, yea, even by means of death. Out of the grave springs life. Out of sacrifice comes power. Every life laid down is a life set free. Every defeat of love is the method of its victory. Lift up your hearts!

Thus hath He unto death His beauty given,  
And so of all which form inheriteth,  
The fall doth pass the rise in worth—  
For birth hath in itself the germ of death,  
And death hath in itself the germ of life.

And that hope lit up the future—the country beyond the shadows of death. How dark it was till Jesus came! How the grave shut out the far horizons. If they believed in that realm at all it was only a dim “perhaps,” and the thought of its uncertain hazard filled the mind with fears. But His rising changed all that. It is true that Lazarus was raised from the dead



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as the story tells. But at the best there was a mighty difference between the rising of Lazarus and the rising of Christ. Lazarus had come back from the other world, back to this life, back to the life of time. But Christ had crossed over and was living the risen life here among them. He was manifesting in their very midst the eternal life, stripped from the limitations of time. He revealed in power and beauty what a great thinker calls "the beyond that is within." They saw Him clad in the radiance of the other country and they saw that it is no realm of shadows, but a new kind of life, victorious, free, and perfect in love. From that moment the shadows were gone from the future. "Blessed be God, who hath begotten us again unto a living hope to an inheritance incorruptible and that fadeth not away."

There is no other way to get this living hope, this assurance that quickens all the springs of our being, but the disciples' way. It is to see Jesus conqueror over death, to get a vision of that deathless love before which sin and the grave are powerless—no stronger, indeed, than the sheath that binds the daffodil bulb, or the earth which imprisons it. To see that love is the only way to be sure. To meet the risen

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Christ in the deeps of our being where He has power to come into touch with us, that is the experience which quickens hope. Nothing else, will do it. We may have beautiful images drawn from nature to express it. "Beyond that cypress tree there is always the sky," says an Eastern proverb. It is beautiful and suggestive. Beyond the weeping willows there is the far horizon. The sun that sets when those we love are passing is rising for them in some other country where begins the new morning. The spirit that took its rise in this world has sought the sunlight of another land to ripen it, like a rose which strays across the wall to seek the sun it needs. It is all beautiful. But can you say it till you have seen Jesus? Can you believe it till you have met Him in the garden where is a grave? Can you be sure of that new day till the Easter morning has dawned for you with the advent of Christ into your life here and now? That faith He stands waiting to give us, waiting till we fling down the shutters of doubt and fear, and open our heart to Him like Thomas, saying, "My Lord, and my God."

THE OPEN SECRET OF CHRISTIAN  
CERTAINTY

By E. S. Woods, M.A.  
Hon. Canon of Ely

*" If Christ has not risen, your faith is of no avail."*

I Corinthians xv, 17.

(Weymouth's Translation.)

## The Open Secret of Christian Certainty

THAT is a very strong thing to say. It must have startled some of those who heard it when, in some room in Corinth, the letter from their absent leader was read out to the little company of Christians. They, guided by him, had been through some very remarkable experiences. They had seen swift and electrifying changes in human lives when men and women had really grasped what St. Paul told them about God being Father and Jesus being alive and available. And now he who had led them out into this wonderful experience confesses quite bluntly that the whole thing for him and for them is a phantasy, a delusion, if he is wrong in the central fact of his message, that Jesus is not dead but alive. It was indeed unthinkable that he was wrong, for had they not seen the power of Christ lifting up and restoring some of the hopeless human wreckage all round them? But it was well, and perhaps they felt it was well, that the thing should be stated with this uncompromising

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clearness. Take away the living Christ, says St. Paul to them in effect, and you take away the rock beneath the Christian's feet, you cut out the heart of the Gospel, you have abandoned the hope of good tidings for the multitudes; your faith, in fact, "is futile." After all, Christianity is a historical religion, and it stands or falls by the alleged fact that God entered history in the human being Jesus Christ who, at a given period and on the scene of this earth, was born and lived and died and came alive again.

Let us make the attempt to think ourselves back again into the atmosphere and the happenings of the first Easter Day. To appreciate St. Paul's insistence on the Resurrection as the central fact of Christian faith, it is necessary to try and have some clear idea, so far as that is possible, as to what actually happened and as to the effect of that happening on the minds of the first disciples. Whatever interpretation may be given to some of the details in the story, there is hardly room for doubt that the disciples were quite certain that they saw and were in communication with the Jesus whom they had known so intimately before His crucifixion; and unless one is to suppose that the whole of Christian history since, with its immeasurable results of

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good for the world, is built upon something ultimately false, then there is equally little room for doubt that the experience of the risen Christ which these men and women enjoyed was a reality and not a delusion. Even those Christian scholars who are unable to believe that the tomb was actually found empty all agree in thinking that Christ did really appear to His disciples after His death.

For my own part I find the evidence sufficiently convincing that the tomb was indeed found empty, and that the body which Jesus had worn in the days of His flesh was in fact transmuted into the "glorious body" of His resurrection appearances. But it is not mainly on the evidences that I propose to dwell just now. I want to touch upon the way, which indeed has an evidential value of its own, in which the appearances are recorded, and to notice the wonderful care and delicacy with which He made Himself known to the disciples after His resurrection.\* In His characteristic way he showed an infinite respect for human personality and refused to force conviction on anyone. As in the days gone by in Galilee and in Judaea, He leads His

\* This point is noticed in some detail in H. Latham's *The Risen Master*.

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disciples gently, finding with a beautiful delicacy just the right way for their minds to receive this tremendous new revealing of God and of Himself. So at the empty tomb in the early dawn of the first Easter Day no one *sees* the act of resurrection ; Peter and John are left to draw the inference, which John did actually draw, from the flat grave clothes lying on the niche in the empty rock chamber. So, too, with Mary in the garden. A few seconds would be enough to steady shattered nerves, and so He lets her think first of all He is the gardener, and the briefest moment or two of very matter-of-fact conversation is enough to prepare her for the astounding recognition of who He really is. So again on the walk to Emmaus that first afternoon—what a walk that must have been ! It is a unique situation and again it is handled with the same convincing skill. He first with the utmost sympathy and understanding helps them to clear their minds, aids them in putting together the disconnected puzzle-pieces, which are already lying in their hands, and then at last at the meal, with minds steadied and cleared and braced, they know Him. Thus it was with all the resurrection appearances. Now on the road, now in the garden, now in the upper room



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at Jerusalem, now by the sea of Galilee, to some in one way and to some in another, the great fact dawned on the minds of these men and women until it illuminated and irradiated the whole of life, the fact that the Jesus whom they loved was really and truly still alive and with them.

For us to-day to understand and to live the Christian life it is important, perhaps indispensable, to understand the religious outlook and experience of the first group of Christians. Evidently their spiritual experience was most deeply affected by this fact of the Resurrection. It seems fairly clear that the Resurrection altered or added to the content of their consciousness of God in at least two directions. First, it did in a real sense give them back their faith in God's goodness and in His government of the world, which must have been very nearly completely shattered by the Crucifixion.

Think for a moment how the Crucifixion must have affected their religious conceptions, far and above the agonizing personal loss of a dearly loved and deeply revered master and friend. After three years spent in Jesus' company, they may not have attained what we should call any very definite doctrinal or theological conclusion about Him. They loved Him deeply ; they revered Him

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profoundly ; they realized that He was wholly and utterly good without any flaw or blemish in His goodness ; they had seen Him wield a power over men and over nature greater than anything they had ever dreamed of. They recognized too, that there was a link and relationship between Him and the eternal God of a kind and degree greater than anything in ordinary human experience. And the keener minds among them had at any rate begun to recognize that all this was not, so to say, accidental or the effect of any earthly or natural forces ; they felt that in Jesus, God in heaven was Himself deliberately doing something on earth, that their master was in fact Messiah, God's sent one, anointed one. Just when they were reaching these conclusions and were beginning to understand what the Christ might be and do for their nation and for the world, His life and work are abruptly terminated by the hideous death of a condemned criminal. When that happened they must inevitably have felt that the moral foundations of the world were sagging. If the one really good man the world has ever seen, if this God-sent deliverer and redeemer of human kind can be thus finished with and done to death, they must almost have begun to wonder whether

## The Open Secret of Christian Certainty

goodness is worth while and whether God's providential government of the world does not now seem to be a pure delusion.

Then came the happenings of that first Easter Day, and they had their faith given back to them. They found after all that goodness had not been defeated, that God had not abdicated. They knew now that that dreadful death was not the end ; indeed it was a new beginning, and, as they were to learn and to preach before very long, viewed in the light of the Resurrection it would be found to have in itself an unsuspected and amazing power to heal and to uplift and to redeem. It is not easy to realize what a revulsion their minds in those days underwent from an unutterable despair to an unspeakable hope. Like a condemned criminal receiving a reprieve, like a mother who thought her son was dead and finds he is alive, they emerged out of thick darkness into radiant sunshine. And their Easter experiences did far more than restore their old instinctive belief in God's government of the world. It gave them an altogether new conception of possible ways in which that which is apparently evil may be made, in the alchemy of God's providence, to serve the purposes of goodness and truth and love.

## Easter Sermons

There was a second mighty result which the Resurrection had for Christ's followers. It meant nothing less than a carrying over of their fellowship with Him into the region of the unseen and the eternal. That friendship between Jesus of Nazareth and the faithful little group who left all and followed Him is one of the most beautiful stories ever told—too beautiful indeed to have been invented. By the lake shore, on the road, on the hill-side, in town and in village, among the flowers of Galilee and amidst the seething mobs of Jerusalem at festival time, they had kept Him company, week in week out, through three, happy, strenuous, dangerous years. Gradually He, His thoughts and His plans, had come to dominate their whole horizon. All their interests and hopes became centred in Him. Their life revolved round Him. And they loved Him with a love which far outran their understanding of Him. He often puzzled them sorely ; and why He seemed to court disaster and death was a question to which they could find no answer. But their love had no alternative to Him. "Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life." For them He was the way and the truth and life itself.

Then the thing most dreaded descended upon

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them, mercilessly, relentlessly, and their friend was killed. Must not this be the end of their friendship? Could that wonderful companionship be now ever more than a fragrant memory? So, surely, they thought that first Good Friday, and during the thirty-six hours of numbing pain that followed. Calvary, for them, was a thick darkness, that blotted out the face of God, and swallowed up the best thing their life had ever known—this warm and intimate fellowship with One who summed up in Himself all their highest thoughts of man and of God.

“Joy cometh in the morning.” As the darkness flees away before the rising sun, their gloom was pierced by the light that shone from the open sepulchre. Not only, as we have seen, could they once again believe in God and in goodness; more precious still, they learnt that their friendship with Jesus was not, after all, shattered by death. What a chasm death seems! Who can but feel, and fear, its awful, paralysing silence? Can faith find any foothold here? It has been truly said that “a man can scarcely be said to have a God at all until he has a God who puts a new meaning into the fact of death, and fills the life before and the life after death alike with the light of His presence. Of all the hard or

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impossible things which Christ had to do none was apparently more impossible than to carry the friendship between Him and His own safely across the chasm of death, and, planting it in the unseen, make it the seed of a never-ceasing fellowship between Himself and men. This was what needed to be done." And the Easter story says it was done ; and, from that day to this, that conviction and that experience have been the very heart and core of all Christian faith and Christian life.

One point specially should be noticed. It is that the Resurrection meant for Christ's disciples much more than a mere survival of the old friendship. They entered into an altogether new relationship. In fact from now onwards their communion with God and their friendship with Jesus became merged and blended in one experience. There was no going back to what might be called the Galilee conditions of their companionship with Him ; though they had known Christ after the flesh, from henceforth they knew Him so no more. He was evidently at pains to make this clear to them ; "do not cling to Me," He says to Mary, "for I am not yet ascended." The real, final, satisfying intimacy must be spiritual, dependent on no present sense im-

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pressions nor on mere past and earthly memories. It was a fellowship altogether transformed, and so made available for all mankind.

In the old Evangelical vocabulary of religious experience, there is a word which deserves to survive, and that is the word "assurance." A man who has "assurance" has got beyond a religion of guesses and subjective hopes ; his faith has rock beneath it, and he is more sure of God and of Christ than of anything he can see and handle on this visible earth. The secret of that certainty is the Resurrection. This is not the "cock-sureness" of ignorance, nor the blind belief of fanaticism. It is the deep, calm certitude of the man who, with his eyes open to all the facts, is driven to conclude that the Resurrection "makes sense" of God's relations to the world, and who knows, by testing it, the power of the risen Christ in his own life.

"Jesus ! We fall with all the ponderous weight  
Of thought, grief, conscience, not upon the film  
Of subtlest reasonings, nor the shifting cloud  
Of partial hopes ideal, but direct  
On Thee and on that sepulchre of Thine,  
Once shut, for ever open, life's true gate." \*

Religion to-day needs more of this Easter certainty. Christians are missing their birth-

\* Bishop Handley Moule.

right if they are not sure of God, and know next to nothing of the radiantly happy daily companionship of Jesus Christ. The Church contains too many members who are ineffective because they are uncertain. The world needs a religion, not which men must laboriously uphold, but which can itself carry all the immeasurable weight of a sinning and suffering humanity. Such a religion can only be given to the world by men who can say "I know," by Christians who will face all human need, moral and physical, with the buoyant certainty of ample resources in Christ to meet it. I remember hearing a story of the crossing of a frozen river in the wilds of Canada. A traveller on foot came to its shore. He was on an urgent errand and in great haste to reach the other side ; to attempt to get to a bridge would have meant days of further travelling. He was unacquainted with that river or that part of the country, and, it being early in the winter season, he did not know how thick the ice was and whether it would bear. After tentative efforts to gauge its thickness and strength he at last in much trepidation crawled carefully across. While he sat on the further bank relieved at his safe passage he saw a man driving a sleigh filled with a heavy



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load drive up on the bank he had left and without a moment's hesitation whip up his team and cross the ice, sleigh and all. The first man had to guess at the strength of the ice ; the second man was secure in the knowledge that the ice would bear any load he could put upon it. In effective service for the Kingdom of God, there is all the difference in the world between the man who regards religion as a doubtful but just possible way of crawling to safety, and the man who knows it will bear, and is meant to bear, any weight you put upon it.

A humanity impotent to redeem itself must find redemption in a religion of power. In Christ, in the risen Christ, is revealed a God who acts ; who leaves the heavens and comes amongst men with power and great glory. That the mightiness of His power may be made known among men to-day, there must be forthcoming disciples of Jesus who know the meaning of the empty tomb, and who have learnt its certainties. Such is the weapon which shall bring victory for the Kingdom. That is the faith that overcometh the world.

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